

HOME LANDSCAPES: TRADITION, IDENTITY,
AND ENVIRONMENTS

by

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STATEMENT OF THESIS APPROVAL

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ABSTRACT

A discussion of the problem of space, place, and the human connection to the environment, this thesis deals with complexities of connection to landscapes and confronts the forms of literary story that work to create a linguistic connection to place, through tradition, identity and the environment.

For Robin, Laird, ABNPJJ, R, and Xyla

Thank you.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Wherever I sat, there I might live, and the landscape radiated from me accordingly. ...and there I did live, for an hour, a summer and a winter life; saw how I could let the years run off, buffet the winter through, and see the spring come in.
(Thoreau, Walden 65)

In kindergarten one of the first assignments we were given was to draw a picture of our homes. We were learning about maps and neighborhoods, and addresses. We were learning to locate ourselves. This lesson was part of a list of general practical information in which we learned to spell our names, dial our phone numbers, and memorize our addresses. Each skill went along with a practical application: our name identified us, the phone number was essential for calling home in case of an emergency, and the address was important in case we ever became separated from our class. These skills were expressed with a serious note of caution, *you must learn these skills in case you get lost or stolen*. Even at that early stage in learning about place we were made aware of the dangers of being without it. Name, address and phone number were our locators specifying where we should be, even if we didn't know where we were.

I lived in a two-story red brick colonial-looking duplex that my father and uncle built. I lived on the east side with my family and my cousins lived on the west side, next door. I knew my house had two front doors, and I knew to include the four main windows on the

front of the house. Dutifully I included a cross through each box to indicate that the squares were windows. And because my father was a brick mason and had pointed out such details, I knew that the bricks of the house were significantly placed in an offset pattern. Windows, doors, brick, and a brown roof—these were the elements that made up my house.

When everyone's houses were drawn and colored my teacher tacked them up around the outside edge of the front bulletin board. In the center of the board was a large aerial plat map of the school boundaries with a small American flag marking the school's location. From each picture my teacher ran red yarn to various points on the map indicating where each person's house was located. For the next month or so we could stare at the bulletin board and see where we lived on the map in relation to the school and to everyone else.

My recollection of this assignment is marked by two specific moments. The first moment was when my teacher scolded me for coloring each individual brick of my house. The problem was that, in an effort to depict my house realistically, I had drawn hundreds of tiny bricks and insisted on coloring each one at a time to avoid going outside the lines. My diligence kept me from recess and my other work forcing my teacher to take away a half colored red brick building so I could work on tracing the letters of the alphabet. The second moment that I recall was when we sat in a semicircle near the bulletin board and our teacher explained how the map worked. She pointed to the roads and encouraged kids to see if they could trace their way through the streets to the school. As I sat and looked at the map I realized that it was wrong. The map, either in translation to bulletin board, or because of when it was created, had no indication of the private street, at the end of which my house sat. So when my teacher placed the pin upon the board to indicate my house, it was stuck at a dead end street, one block over.

This illustration conveys three ways of framing a sense of home. First is the aspect of representation or tradition, second is the personal experience or identity with place, and third is the construct of home within the bounds of place through relationships with the physical world.

The reality of my understanding of home during kindergarten must have been at least a bit more complex than the picture I presented, but as a child I was limited by artistic capabilities and my understanding of how to draw any home, let alone my own. Though my house, a duplex, had a large porch, and two additional windows on the front, and though it lacked square panes in the windows, these details did not deter me from drawing what I understood to be a house. As a result my house relied on traditional patterns of home. A box, a triangle, and four windows made up my representation of home. Aside from an additional door it was a model of the symbolic and traditional box-triangle house children learn to draw. Few people in the U.S. live in such a soda-box house, fewer still in the rest of the world, yet this traditional depiction of a house represented home for my peers and myself at that time.

A second point drawn from this illustration of home is a construct of place in relation to personal experience or identity. While my drawing, along with the drawings of my peers, presented a nearly homogenous representation of home, they still allowed for some variation and unique interpretation due to our own personal experiences. I knew about bricks and how they were laid because of my father's work as a brick mason. When he pointed out the detail of the brick he taught me to identify the material and structure of the house as home. In time I came to understand that brick was part of my identity: the daughter of a brick mason, who was the son of a brick mason, who was the son of brick mason, who was the son of a brick

mason. My identity was built into the significance of the material that made up my home and thus I saw brick as a necessary element in order to depict my home. In my experience to truly identify with a place as home it had to be built, by my inherited culture, with brick.

Finally this illustration shows the physical world as another way to understand the nature of the place as home. The representation of my house was telling as much by what was missing from the picture as what was included. There was a lack of any type of setting or landscape. There were no animals, no people, no trees, or plants, or any type of life. The house lacked the neighbors, boundaries, and fences; it lacked the driveway, cars, and toys that generally surrounded it. It was without context and so the house floated on white paper, ungrounded, and unaffiliated. My representation of the house as a five-year-old portrayed only the house itself. Without any environmental details my drawing lacked the intimate context and meaning essential for home. The lesson of locating ourselves on the map was dependant upon relations—to the map, the school, and one another. In order to have a sense of where we were we needed to know where we were not. These experiences dealt with the most basic and physical understanding of place. We knew where we were through the environment surrounding our homes. I knew that my house was not on the street over because I knew the physical environment surrounding my home in relation to the map my teacher had created. Without the relevant physical relationships, even in its representation, the house cannot be a home.

The relationship with home presented in my class was for practical purposes, but even at that time, home meant more than just a house. To me it was a refuge, safety, and comfort. It was a specific place where I belonged. It was the place where I could never be “lost.”

The scope of this thesis is focused upon the various concepts and constructions of home; specifically, home as a place built out of tradition, identity, and the physical world. And ultimately how the concept of home and the expansion of home can play a role in shaping the environment on a more global scale.

My concept of home is drawn from the construction of home as a specific place. Place, as a concept, is currently being researched and discussed more thoroughly in cultural geography. Timothy Cresswell, a cultural geographer, explains that,

Places are created by cultural practices such as literature, film and music and the investigation of these forms of producing places are a central strand in contemporary human geography. But most places are more often the product of everyday practices. Places are never finished but produced through the reiteration of practices – the repetition of seemingly mundane activities on a daily basis. (Cresswell, Place 82)

This thesis draws from this conception of place a sense of home as a specific place made up through traditions, identity, and the physical world as constructed in cultural and daily practices. While I focus upon three authors and their literary works as a construct of home, ultimately the goal is to expand the human concept of home to beyond a small localized physical structure of house, town, or country to include the Earth as our collective home. Geographer Yi-fu Tuan regards his own work in Geography as a “study of the Earth as the home of people” (Tuan, View of Geography 99). Humans construct a sense of place, a home, within the confines of an environment, and identify with that environment through culture and traditions. As our human conception of home expands beyond the traditional, personal identity and specific environments we open our capability to envision the Earth as our home.

This thesis focuses upon the literature of making home because people learn to categorize and identify with the world through the power of language. Language is a daily habit and as Tuan writes, in his article entitled “Language and the Making of Place”:

Insiders see “home-place”—an environment that is familiar to them, not because they have materially transformed it but because they have named it. It is their place—their world—through the casting of a linguistic net. Plants and animals become a part of the human socioeconomic order when they appear in a classificatory scheme. At a more affective level, storytelling converts mere objects “out there” into real presences. Myths have this power to an outstanding degree because they are not just any story but are foundational stories that provide support and glimmers of understanding for the basic institutions of society; at the same time, myths, by weaving in observable features in the landscape (a tree here, a rock there), strengthen a people’s bond to place. (Tuan 686)

By constructing home through stories, the landscape, an object “out there” becomes a real presence, an environment, linked to the sense of place with an identity of home. When one goes into a landscape, discovers the inhabitants, walks with the flora and fauna then the landscape transitions from landscape to an environment. As an environment people are able to construct traditions that allow them to identify with the world around them and with each other. Through stories we create a common culture, which like the physical world can waken our sensibilities to our connections with one another and the earth.

The literature that I examine provides a variety of perspectives on the construction and representation of home in place. To better explore and understand the representation and human relations to home-place I analyze, in the following chapters, the work of three authors and their construction of home through traditions, identity, and the physical world. To contextualize this work Chapter 2 presents a quick literature review addressing the geographical conversations of place and how traditions, identity, and the physical world work together to form a sense of home.

Chapter 3 focuses upon traditions and explores tradition as a construct of home through the work of author Velma Wallis. Wallis, a native Alaskan woman, presents home through stories told traditionally by her native Gwich'in people: Two Old Women, and Bird Girl and the Man who Followed the Sun, as well as her own autobiography, Raising Ourselves. The two traditional myths present foundational stories linking Wallis and her people to the land of Alaska, the arctic and a community ethic built upon traditions for identity and survival. Complicating her depiction of home through these traditional stories is her own story, Raising Ourselves, which presents her own experience with home and finding her heritage despite neglected traditions. These tales of home present a perspective of the importance of tradition in place attachment and the construction of home.

Complementing Wallis' work on tradition and heritage, Chicana writer and theorist Gloria Anzaldúa's work, Borderlands / La Frontera, presents a sense of home through identity. Identity of the self constructs home through a personal understanding and acceptance of the myths, traditions, and culture of an individual within a community, both local and global. In Chapter 4 I evaluate Anzaldúa's work of place and home as embodied within the Self and identity. Her construction of the *New Mestiza* creates a sense of home through the acceptance of various heritages and cultures—Other—parts of the self. In accepting a diverse identity the self is able to move freely through the world as a global citizen, one who carries home with him or her. Anzaldúa writes,

To separate from my culture (as from my family) I had to feel competent enough on the outside and secure enough inside to live life on my own. Yet in leaving home I did not lose touch with my origins because *lo mexicano* is in my system. I am a turtle, wherever I go I carry 'home' on my back. (Anzaldúa, Borderlands 43)

Just as Anzaldúa constructs a mobile sense of home centered within the self, geographer Doreen Massey has posed the idea that a sense of place is a fluid relationship rather than a fixed one, thus appropriately carried upon one's back, but also mobile on its own. Place, for Massey, is the exchange at intersections of the self and other. As cultures and people connect throughout the globe each is rupturing the borders which define "us" and "them." Geographer Timothy Cresswell notes, "the construction of place is more often than not achieved through the exclusion of some 'other' – a constitutive outside" (Cresswell, Place 96). Anzaldúa and Massey each build a sense of home in the notion of "otherness" but one which incorporates the other as part of identity. As such, Anzaldúa places her Mexican, American, and Indian—Chicana—traditions and experiences in the crosses between physically belonging to the land, physically burying the female umbilical cord beneath the house to tie her to the home (Anzaldúa, Borderlands), and metaphysically constructing the ties and traditions which loose her from place, which in turn constructs a new sense of the self, an identity with place.

Finally, Chapter 5 is an examination of the work of Mary Oliver and her construct of home within the physical world. Oliver, a poet, essayist, and naturalist, has spent her life in the observation and relations of nature. Her written work reflects the close connection she has formed to nature through attention to her environment and home-place on the east coast in a small town named Provincetown. Oliver writes of going out into the woods and landscapes as a "relief" she "felt more at home [there] than anywhere else, including [her] own home" (Oliver, Winter Hours 96). For Oliver home is inside and out. She makes her home in the places she walks and the places she writes. Her poems are a kind of home, a reverence for the world as home, each built upon the experience and intimate connection to

place (Oliver, Long Life). The feral cranberries in the bog are her pantry; the ocean is her tub, her font—washing her, baptizing her clean, and feeding her stomach with fish, or her poetry with the steady rhythms of waves. The hills, and lakes, and sandbars, and woods are all part of her sense of home because they are not landscape to her. She makes the paths. She buries her dead dogs in the soft soils; she unearths turtle eggs for a meal. There is a symbiotic relationship that allows exchange and connection.

Oliver presents a model of home that includes the environment and allows for the flora, fauna, and weather to be part of the identifying markers of home. Rather than excluding their history, she writes of the environment as her own history: her examination and internalization of the physical world as home, balanced with tradition and identity to place, as the final element of constructing home and connecting humans to the physical material of the earth as home.

Within this thesis, after looking at the various representations and relations of place as home, I will discuss how home translates into human interaction with mother Earth. Ultimately, my objective is to define the elements of home: traditions, identity, and the physical world, in order to realize the human priorities and values with the environment as a means of determining if there is room (space/place) in the experience of home to create a global sense of home, and what that global sense might look like.

CHAPTER 2

LOCATING HOME: A LITERATURE REVIEW

For this chapter there are two objectives. First is to organize the thoughts of the theorists from a variety of disciplines in order to establish the context of home as a place. The second objective is to establish how this research fits in with the larger conversation of place and home and how our conception, and construction, of home fits into the environment, and ultimately Earth as home.

In order to understand home as a specific place one must understand “place.” This chapter first explores place in the geographical sense, and then home in place through traditions of home, the physical structure—the house, and finally as a social construct.

The Geography of Place

Place is a term, and an idea, that has come to the forefront in geographical studies over the past several decades. While “place” is a common term in everyday life and language, it is also imbued with a rich meaning beyond referential locale. Places are understood to be cities, states, houses, environments, ecosystems, or ideas such as, “you have a place in my heart.” Geographer Tim Cresswell claims, “Place is everywhere. This makes it different from other terms in geography like ‘territory,’ which announces itself as a specialized term” (Place 2). Place can be everywhere because it functions as both a center of

meaning, which is a mental conceptualization, as well as a physical manifestation of locations and relation to space. The most common definition of place is space to which meaning has been ascribed (Buell). When one speaks of place one refers to both the physical and mental relationships of locations within meaning, structure, or locale which make up the whole. Cresswell writes,

We live in a world of meaning. We exist in and are surrounded by places—centers of meaning. Places are neither totally material nor completely mental; they are combinations of the material and mental and cannot be reduced to either. A church, for instance, is a place. It is neither just a particular material artifact, nor just a set of religious ideas; it is always both. Places are duplicitous in that they cannot be reduced to the concrete or the ‘merely ideological’; rather they display an uneasy and fluid tension between them. (In Place / Out of Place 13)

Because life functions within the balance of these suggested tensions of the concrete and ideological, place acts as a container for the exchange between both. Place allows for the pause and performance of negotiating the mental and physical world. Yi-fu Tuan, a leading humanistic geographer on the subject of place writes, “Place is a pause in movement. Animals, including human beings, pause at a locality because it satisfies certain biological needs. The pause makes it possible for a locality to become a center of felt value” (Space and Place 138). Within the pause of place humans and animals are able to establish a connection between their activities, their values, and their environments. The personalization and the experience of building meaning into place are what Cresswell terms “place-making activities.” He writes,

All over the world people are engaged in place-making activities. Homeowners redecorate, build additions, manicure the lawn. Neighborhood organizations put pressure on people to tidy their yards; city governments legislate for new public buildings to express the spirit of particular places. Nations

project themselves to the rest of the world through postage stamps, money, parliament buildings, national stadia, tourist brochures, etc. (Place 5)

Such personalized activities transform the space of pause into a place of meaning and experience. While Cresswell's examples focus on commodity and visual aspects of place-making activities, place can be made in other more relaxed moments too. Place is formed where one sits, sleeps, eats, rejuvenates, as well as plays, works, maintains, and purchases. In other words, place is located by experience and language identified in and through physical or verbal cues of connection and recognition to location, time and events.

The contrast to the idea of place is the idea of space. Yi-fu Tuan focuses on the experience of place in his book, Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience. Space is the shapeless, the void, and the unseen or unexplored. Space is what is beyond our experience and thus beyond a sense of place or objectivity, mentality, or physicality. Space then is made up of the abstract beyond experience or language. Because there is no activity or time tied to space, to markers of life or evidence of connection, it holds only the vague ideas of "out there," and beyond "place" or meaning.

Tuan notes how humans locate themselves in space by perceiving the self as a type of compass in comparison to space. Humans identify front and back, right and left, up and down, forward and backward based upon their personal orientations within space through their sense of self and their physical senses (Tuan, Space and Place). By distinguishing the self in a location, and identifying the space in orientation to the self and the experience of the self, humans create a sense of place by giving value to the experience of self in space. "Place is a type of object. Places and objects define space, giving it a geometric personality" (Tuan, Space and Place 17). As one establishes places based upon personal experience and exercise

within that space the ambiguity of space becomes defined by the human relationships that occur there and allow for meaning to be built up through repetitions and orientations of the human self.

Relationships help to define boundaries of objects and self, or space and place. If space is without shape or relation it is partially because it is without language. Humans name what is valued and infuse such objects with symbolic and syntactic meaning. By defining space one transforms the indistinguishable into a place which allows the body and self to orient more quickly to the object and boundaries of meaning within a location. As an example of space and naming Cresswell relates an account of the German geographer Aurel Krause whose work led him to the lands of the Tlingits, an indigenous people of the Pacific Northwest Coast.

The Tlingits, whose livelihood depended upon the sea, had many names for the waters of the ocean, the bays, the inlets, and the islands they navigated around in search of food, but “the land remained unnamed and seemingly invisible” (Cresswell, Place 10). Cresswell explains that while Krause and his men, coming from the experience of Germany and a land based resource system, saw the sea as empty space and the land, with its enormous mountain peaks, as a valuable resource of life, the opposite was true for the Tlingits. So it was that the Tlingits named the sea, saw the sea, and lived by the sea making that their “home-place,” while the mountains remained an unnamed and unexplored space. The Tlingits lived upon the beaches, close to their sense of real place—the ocean, and ignored the mountains which only the Germans, from their own homeland experience, saw as the valuable locale.

Lawrence Buell, an environmental literary critic, writes of space and place in his essay, “Space, Place, and the Imagination.” In order to name places as objects and relationships one must distinguish them from space through language and experience. In his efforts to define space and place Buell writes,

Place entails spatial location, entails a spatial container of some sort. But space as against place connotes geometrical or topographical abstraction whereas place is ‘space to which meaning has been ascribed’...Each place is also ‘inseparable from the concrete region in which it is found’ and defined by physical markers as well as social consensus. (63)

For Buell, like Tuan and Cresswell, place is the holder of sense and sentiment. Place, beyond a name, is a border fencing off ambiguous space and intimate, attached, sensuous and familiar space—place. Buell sums up place by quoting Eugene Walter as saying, “A place is seen, heard, smelled, imagined, loved, hated, feared, revered” (63). Space is then the ambiguous “out there” and place is sensually experienced right here.

Of course the human experience of place and space is always more complicated than this dualism suggests. To create a place one must enter into the ambiguous of space, which is itself a shadow land, or a type of place without the concrete experience of knowing or naming. But the value of dividing space and place in terms of the human connection to a landscape or an experience are necessary to understand how one negotiates the physical actions in place, with the separation of culture and identity. Geography lends a language that can help sort the borders of the self from the world one so eagerly seeks to be a part of.

Buell explores how one creates meaning in place as “place attachment” to the locations that one experiences through various sensibilities. He suggests that humans conceptualize and recognize places through five modes: first knowledge of place as concentric circles with familiarity radiating out from a set and intimate place, then place

attachment as archipelagos islands—a variety of intimate spaces separated by travel often through ‘nonplaces’, then imaginary places, the place of memories, and finally changed places (Buell). What follows is a summary of Buell’s modes of place attachment, what he calls “mental mapping,” and the distinction made between place and nonplace.

Beginning with concentric circles of place attachment, the sense of self with respect to space and other objects is a matter of distance. Buell explains this form of mental mapping as the most “traditional” form of place attachment; with the center of the model as a place of familiarity and comfort, such as one’s home, and from that comfortable center the fanning circles beyond are representative of “increasing fear and anxiety of the unknown” (72). Traditionally a sense of place was established as the places one visited, usually walked to, on a daily basis. The territories closest to center of place attachment are frequently visited places such as home, work, school, church and the grocer. The initial circle could be comprised of one or all of these habitual places. Places frequented rarely, or never, make up the outer circles, or beyond, as the space of the unknown world (Buell).

Chapter 3 of this thesis discusses how Velma Wallis writes of traditional lands her nomadic native Gwich’in people walked and hunted each season following the caribou through their grazing lands. For her people the territory beyond their followed paths belonged to other bands or enemies. Trespassing beyond the spheres of place could be dangerous and even deadly. In this traditional mode of place there is only space and place, the known and the unknown. The world is experienced everywhere and is traveled by contact.

With the advent of new technology, however, the circles of place attachment begin to expand and then break apart. Buell notes that with modernization, planes, trains, and

automobiles, “place attachment spreads out to look more like an archipelago than concentric circles” (72). Work and school are increasingly spread out away from the home. Relatives live at greater distances from one another visiting for holidays. Fewer people reside in their childhood homes, and for the affluent, second and third homes are available for seasonal visits (Buell). The ease at which distance is covered these days makes breaking free from concentric circles possible and relatively painless. With a global economy, income and influence are spread throughout the cities of the world. People still feel attachment to the places in which they participate, but the locations of each place are becoming more distant from one another. And the experience of traveling to places in cars or other modes of transportation creates an in-between state of place and space which Buell terms as “nonplaces” (69).

Humans have so many modes for experiencing place, yet so much of our time is spent in nonplaces. Nonplaces are spaces such as “offices, malls, clubs, and transport” constructed to be “neutrally benign and predictably interchangeable” (Buell 69) giving the illusion of places but place created to be exactly like every other place: easily interchangeable. For example, any airport looks and functions much like any other airport. The carpets are indistinguishable industrial, the paint is a bland grey, tan, white neutral scheme, the ‘restaurants’ are predictable franchises with limited options, and the décor is rows of connected chairs positioned near terminal doors to usher people quickly through the space. Nonplaces are what one sees in the movement through space or where one waits to pause. Buell concludes that, while comforting for the buffeted traveler who struggles against the “weirding-out effect of a strange locale,” nonplaces “testify to felt problems of place-deprivation” (71). He argues that humans seek places of safety and familiarity because in

such places we have some sense of meaning, however manufactured or false, and thus comforting.

As people shuttle about more frequently over longer distances they can have a sense of displacement and often yearn for a localized sense of self. One reaction to the spread of place attachment, to the stretched experience of place and belonging, is the movement to settle deeply into place, cloistering off the self, or a community, into a localized homogeneous commune. While strong ties to one's roots and local inhabitation aren't necessarily bad, they can produce a sense of otherness, isolation, and exclusion from those outside the community or from the places beyond. Such isolation can lead to distrust and misgivings to the world around them which can lead to misunderstandings of the interrelations essential in living on a shared geography, landscape, or world. These sentiments of localization and displacement are explored thoroughly in the book, The Lure of the Local, written by author and art historian Lucy Lippard. Lippard writes,

The lure of the local is the pull of place that operates on each of us, exposing our politics and our spiritual legacies. It is the geographical component of the psychological need to belong somewhere, one antidote to prevailing alienation.... Inherent in the local is the concept of place—a portion of land/town/cityscape seen from the inside, the resonance of a specific location that is known and familiar. (Lippard 7)

Though Lippard writes of a sense of localized place she does so with the caveat that her book was written while she lived in three different places, her own archipelago enriched by her close sense of belonging to each specific place.

The third mental map of place attachment that Buell discusses is that of the imagined world. Through books, stories, art, painting, song, etc. the human mind creates place and with it a sense of belonging to that place. Connection with the emotional sense of place can

often be a stronger bond to place than even the physical presence of locale (Buell 73).

Lippard notes, “sometimes a spontaneous attraction to place is really an emotional response to the landscape, which is a place at a distance, visual rather than sensual, seen rather than felt in all its affective power” (7-8). The experience of the spontaneous attraction or a mental connection to place is a result of the human condition to work at connecting to the world around them. Lippard suggests, “human creativity is an integral part of the web formed by land, history, culture, and place” (18). Art and creativity help to reveal humankind’s effect and agenda with the earth through history, and policy. Art, or the representation of place, is a means of capturing / recapturing place. The representations created of place help to give it shape, form, and help to legitimize it socially as a collective place. These representations also lend to the imagination an experience beyond sensual recognition by offering the ties of emotion and visual constructs of the self in places, distant and unknown.

Buell’s final two modes of mental mapping are memory and change. Memory is a conditioning of the mind based on experiences. The body is taught to feel and respond to places as a “palimpsest of serial place-experiences” (Buell 73). Essentially the memory is a woven sense of place based upon recurrence and intensity of experience with place. In his work, Place and Experience, philosopher J.E. Malpas writes,

The way in which [childhood] memories and place often become more important to us as we age, and the strong feelings (whether of fondness or, sometimes, of revulsion) that are typically associated with the places of our growing up and of our early life, can be seen as indicative of the founding role of those places in our narratives about ourselves and the establishing of our sense of self-identity. (182)

Connections to the past are an integral part of our identities and our sense of place. Our memories allow us to connect to our own narratives to the world around us, the environments

of our experience. Memories also provide a reference point against change. Just as memory helps to create identity, change forces one to reevaluate identity against or with the flux in place.

Change is the construction, and reconstruction, of place based upon a collective (social) conception of belonging. As the collective memory, with an influx of new identifying populations, inhabits a space, the place changes to fit the new construction of identity with place. Change is inevitable and always in process. One example Buell offers is his childhood place “dramatically transformed by suburban sprawl” building up housing where he once played baseball (73). Change challenges memories and our imaginary sense of place. As people personalize their space to accommodate their needs, or to reflect their ideas of place, places change. Such change spurs the cycle of self-identification with place and displacement constantly forcing its inhabitants to re-evaluate and re-construct a sense of self and place attachment. In his literary work, The Invention of Solitude, Paul Auster writes of his father’s habits and disregard for the change around him.

Always a man of habit, he would leave for work early in the morning, work hard all day, and then, when he came home (on those days he did not work late), take a short nap before dinner. Sometime during our first week in the new house, before we had properly moved in, he made a curious kind of mistake. Instead of driving home to the new house after work, he went directly to the old one, as he had done for years, parked his car in the driveway, walked into the house through the back door, climbed the stairs, entered the bedroom, lay down on the bed, and went to sleep. He slept for about an hour. Needless to say, when the new mistress of the house returned to find a strange man sleeping in her bed, she was a little surprised. But unlike Goldilocks, my father did not jump up and run away. The confusion was eventually settled, and everyone had a good laugh. Even today, it still makes me laugh. And yet, for all that, I cannot help regarding it as a pathetic story. It is one thing for a man to drive to his old house by mistake, but it is quite another, I think, for him not to notice that anything has

changed inside it. Even the most tired or distracted mind has a corner of pure, animal response, and can give the body a sense of where it is. One would have to be nearly unconscious not to see, or at least not to feel, that the house was no longer the same. (8)

As Auster points out, change helps to signify a sense of the self over time and in place.

Potentially as one proceeds through life, and houses, and places, the change enables a greater sense of place in memories, imaginations, and experiences. Because places are centers of meaning even the “feel” of a place is subject to relationships (people, objects, and emotions) that inhabit a place. To be without a sense of place is to be in a state of unconscious habit unaware of the experience of place as separate from space.

Buell’s mental mapping helps to establish the ways one connects to place and the types of relationships one may form to place. One distinction Buell does not make is between landscape and place. Landscapes are the world experienced at a distance, the scenery for viewing. Lippard quotes Alexander Wilson’s take on landscape as “a way of seeing the world and imagining our relationship to nature” (8). The visual cues of space produce relationships between objects, and provide physical manifestations of earth that can be translated into memories and the sensual triggers needed to create memory. Often “landscape” gets mistaken as a sense of place because essentially the word “landscape” is “everything you see when you go outdoors” (Lippard 8). Cresswell distinguishes landscape by its visual properties as well; he writes, “Landscape is an intensely visual idea. In most definitions of landscape the viewer is outside of it. This is the primary way in which it differs from place. Places are very much things to be inside of” (Place 10). Place is located within a boundary marked by the experience with the location, while landscape is a view

taken from an outside perspective. Our human relationship with landscape is one of transforming the what we see, the View, into the settled experience of place.

As humans connect and perform place-making activities they create a sense of the self in relationship to the location of their activities. Buell notes that much of world history is the “history of space becoming place. In the beginning, earth was space without form. Then through inhabitation places were created” (63-64). As people settle into the landscapes and the environments, as people conceptualize places by mapping, changing, and maintaining environments, they build a sense of place.

Defining and constructing place out of space is a cyclical enterprise. In terms of history it is first locating the self within space, and then as one understands location, or as the self orients to space and experiences the environment and one’s position in an ecosystem, then the space turns into a place. Once a sense of place is established the inhabitants tend to re-create the place according to that sense. Buell presents, as an example of this cycle, Thomas Jefferson’s efforts to expand the U.S. territory.

Jefferson ordered a survey of the American lands in order to map out and then break up the space into a grid work of manageable real estate. The result, according to Buell, is a struggle for settlers to “convert ‘democratic social space’ from real estate into livable places” (64). People were forced by the grid of surveyed real estate to establish a concept of property based on superficial, superimposed, linear divisions rather than naturally imposed barriers such as rivers, forests, hillsides, or valleys, as a means of separation. What Buell fails to point out in his example is the way in which settlers settled into the imposed divisions. The cycle of established location, even within the bounds of superimposed limits, warranted a re-construction of place such that as the settlers established land ownership by rectilinear

mapping the land began to appear as the grid: divided and crossed to match the boundaries imposed. Settlers established fences and fields to appear, even if just from an aerial perspective, as the survey maps dictated the land to look.

Once a place is created, and re-created, the cycle starts over, though often more subtly than an obvious survey and grid establishment. The point is that re-creation of place is the bond that forms place attachment, or a sense of belonging to a place because one participates in the cycle of construction and definition. As one performs the reconstruction one begins to recognize the self in place. Over time a self in place, maintaining a farm, yard, or neighborhood, creates a tradition of belonging to the space and displaces any sense of exclusion or imposed regulation such as the grid. Through the experience of transforming and maintaining the place one establishes a self in the environment. And the grid imposed on the land becomes integral—the most meaningful way of constructing a place in the space or landscape.

A Place Called “Home”

Home is the specific fulfillment of the human need for place attachment. Home is the placeholder for the meaning, memories, and experiences of our lives. The Oxford English Dictionary Online defines home as “a place, region or state to which one properly belongs, on which one’s affections centre, or where one finds refuge, rest or satisfaction” (Morely 16). Professor of media and communications, David Morely, in his book, Home Territories, quotes Dietmar Dath as saying, “homes are ‘origin stories’ constructed as retrospective signposts...they are made for coming *from*” (16). As a reference point homes are an embodiment of traditions, which are, themselves, reference points, that inform the self and

one's identity of one's place of origin. What and how an individual reflects back upon the traditions of home is influenced by his understanding of his relationship to that place, community, society, and world. Philosopher J.E. Malpas writes,

To have a sense of one's own past means having a grasp of one's own present and future in relation to the 'story' of one's embodied activity within particular spaces and with respect to particular objects and persons. The past cannot be prised away from the places—that is, from objects and persons as they interact within particular spatio-temporal regions—with respect to which that past is established. (180)

Having history with place, particularly home, gives context to the identity of the self. Along with a place to be from, there is a built-in narrative that is the foundation for the personal narrative.

Place is latitudinal and longitudinal within the map of a person's life. It is temporal and spatial, personal and political. A layered location replete with human histories and memories, place has width as well as depth. It is about connections, what surrounds it, what formed it, what happened there, what will happen there. (Lippard 7)

Home encompasses the infinite timeline of past, present, and future in place. In this respect it plays out the myths and morals of traditions simply by maintaining life. Tuan writes, "the lasting affection for home is at least partly a result of such intimate and nurturing experiences" (Space and Place 138). By belonging to a greater narrative, a person's sense of self can be enriched by history and elongated by the future of place. As long as a place is maintained one has a home.

To maintain a home people have created, or practiced, traditions that allow for the acknowledgement of the layers and depth of human history in place. These performances of traditions provide an active awareness and participation in the creation of place and one's belonging to the narrative. Just as Buell and Malpas suggest collective memories as building

to identity, Witold Rybczynski, a distinguished professor, architect and writer, explores the history of the home in his work, Home: A Short History of an Idea and suggests that the human experience of any place is tied to a collective interpretation of the history, and objects, that occupy place throughout time. In his book Rybczynski writes,

This acute awareness of tradition is a modern phenomenon that reflects a desire for custom and routine in a world characterized by constant change and innovation. Reverence for the past has become so strong that when traditions do not exist, they are frequently invented. (9)

As an example of invented tradition Rybczynski relates the history of early American colonial furniture. During the 1876 Centennial celebrations patriotic societies formed which distinguished people of “colonial heritage” from others (poor immigrants entering the United States) and celebrated their history in America by patriotic claims to history and place. One distinguishing marker for the colonial societies were original “Colonial” furnishings handed down from previous generations proving long heritage in this place. These objects—chairs, beds, tables, stools, etc.—worked to “distance [the established middle class and members of colonial societies] from the increasing number of new, predominately non-British immigrants” (Rybczynski 10) and their presence in the home provided, seemingly, physical proof of long history and belonging.

This tradition of furnishings, despite once belonging to the newest populations of immigrants to the American continent, split classes and immigrant cultures, but also worked to provide a new chapter in economic growth and belonging. It pushed new productions of the old furniture creating what we know as the “early American colonial design.” As the furniture was integrated into furnishing new homes it created a narrative of inclusion and the opportunity for immigrants to buy into the narrative of the new land (Rybczynski). This type

of commodity-instituted assimilation is just one form of tradition created to separate and assimilate people trying to make a home in the same place. While the process worked to include the new comers to a land of homogeneous tradition, it worked to annihilate the culture from which each group came propagating a sense of difference through the symbol of furniture used to include the new comers. Tuan writes,

Attachment to the homeland appears to be a worldwide phenomenon. It is not limited to any particular culture and economy. It is known to literate and non-literate peoples, hunter-gatherers, and sedentary farmers, as well as city dwellers. The city or land is viewed as mother, and it nourishes; place is an archive of fond memories and splendid achievements that inspire the present; place is permanent and hence reassuring to man, who sees frailty in himself and chance and flux everywhere. (Space and Place 154)

Despite the universal quality of home and a connection to place, humans continue to guard against the struggle of our frail existence and allow for divisions between home, resources, place, landscape, belonging, them and us.

While the tradition of home creates connection to place the connection is not traditionally equal. Morely explores the gendered differences of home and place in Home Territories, and notes,

It is not simply the home itself which is coded as feminine. It is also the very realm of tradition – the cultural equivalent of the process of biological reproduction – which is also often understood as “women’s business.” Drawing on the work of Nira Yuval-Davis, Phil Cohen argues that women as mothers are frequently positioned discursively as responsible for the transmission of the cultural patrimony to the next generation. As he notes, “oral traditions conveyed through the ‘mother tongue’ are thus naturalized by association with mother’s milk, and the maternal lap becomes the privileged place where the national heritage itself is institutionalized.” (65)

The tradition of home is not only gendered with women, but home is seen as woman and, interchangeably, woman is seen as home. Woman, localized in the home, is then a place herself to which men return (Morely). And because women and home are synonymous, and a construct as a private secure sphere they are set apart from the masculine public sphere thus limiting the woman and home in terms of freedom and movement. Even as each home and the woman are a valuable they must be protected and locked up, safe from the outside masculine world. Theorist Janet Wolf explains that while modernity promotes the possibility of free wandering and lone travel, or voluntary uprooting and anonymous arrival in new places, such “free and equal mobility is itself a deception, since we don’t all have the same access to the road” (Qtd. Morely 67-68). Those not limited physically or financially from travel from home are constrained by the violence threatened against their bodies such that women, ethnic, and lesbian and gay communities are limited in the public spheres where one might travel beyond the security of home (Morely).

The very fact that women are the seat of home requires that any study of the home must focus upon women’s reflections and intentions at home. Thus it is because women are seen as the seat, literally, of home that this thesis focuses on the works of women. All three authors, Velma Wallis, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Mary Oliver, tend toward the transmission and naturalization of home, but each author does so while troubling the stereotype of feminine domestic. Wallis, though literally conveying the traditions of her people, is excluded from the mainstream “Western culture” feminine conceptualization because of her native heritage.

Like Wallis, Anzaldúa conveys traditional stories and reproduces her displaced culture upon the page, but she breaks from the feminine domestic by her freedom to travel and explore the self in the “public male sphere.” She doubly troubles the feminine domestic

by claiming her lesbian self and forcing it into the conversation addressing “homophobia” and the space for the other in place.

And while Oliver provides a “white woman” perspective, she subverts her role of traditional domestic as she embraces not only her feminine and lesbian identity, but also her animal and natural identity as well. Because these women provide perspectives beyond the stereotype their works push beyond the home as traditionally naturalized and allow, from a subversive perspective, a glimpse into the construct of home broken free from the “institutionalized” white Western boundary of place.

By incorporating the nontraditional into the collective sense of home, our collective sense of home is able to broaden and split into the important, complex nuances of place in the physical and social world.

The Physical Home: The House

Representations, relationships, and experience with place materialize also in the physically rendered home—the house. Tuan notes that physicality makes people aware. He writes,

Building is a complex activity. It makes people aware and take heed at different levels: at the level of having to make pragmatic decisions; of envisioning architectural spaces in the mind and on paper; and of committing one’s whole being, mind and body, to the creation of a material form that captures an ideal. Once achieved, architectural form is an environment for man... The built environment, like language, has the power to define and refine sensibility. It can sharpen and enlarge consciousness. Without architecture feelings about space must remain diffuse and fleeting. (Space and Place 106-107)

The ambiguity of space is clearly illustrated as it functions in the architecture of houses.

Architect Sarah Susanka writes in her book, The Not So Big House, the story of some clients

whose brand new half-million dollar house was overwhelming, ostentatious, and unwanted. She points out that the scale and proportions of each room were designed to overwhelm, rather than welcome, and because her clients didn't have a chance for input, the house was too large to be a home for them.

[The owners] didn't have the words to describe what they wanted, nor did they realize how important it was to have input into the "feel" of the house. If a builder hears that a home buyer wants a spacious family room, he reasonably assumes that they are asking for a BIG family room. (The Not So Big House 10)

Space, physically rendered, requires the context of comparison. Ratios, scales, proportion all require the context of experience, either experience of the self or shared experience through transmission such as story. Because home is a very specific place, and the individual experience is a specific one, general language is not enough to convey the experience of space and place in home. Language fails in the interpretation and the context. "Spacious" and "big," while descriptions of space are not in fact synonymous.

Susanka writes, "although many people have a highly developed sense of space, because we don't have a common language to describe our spatial experiences, we've resorted to talking in terms of size and volume rather than in terms of the qualities of the space" (Home by Design 6). Home has become the catchall phrase used to describe the general place without the clear delineation between the qualities of space, place, and the self.

Renowned American architect Frank Lloyd Wright writes of homes and architecture as having a "grammar" of its own. He writes,

"Grammar," in this sense, means the same thing in any construction—whether it be of words or of stone or wood. It is the shape-relationship between the various elements that enter into the constitution of the thing. The "grammar" of the house is its manifest articulation of all its parts. This will be the

“speech” it uses. To be achieved, construction must be grammatical. ... When the chosen grammar is finally adopted...everything has a related articulation in relation to the whole and all belongs together; looks well together because all together are speaking the same language. (181)

Consider the language of the “split-level” home in terms of the syntactic address of space and design. There is a splice in the house creating a rupture in interaction or conception of home. The cohesion of home is divided in layout and in name. The name divides the space of home into split-levels which syntactically separates the inhabitants housed within. This physical structure creates divisions within the levels of a home, all blending together or cutting off one from another, dividing a sense of place. The physical walls within the structure separate activity and interaction thus secluding away people behind more and more divisions. Buell’s delineations for place attachment, his mental mappings mentioned previously, reflects a fragmented world built with connectional walls and barriers between experiences and locations, or experiences and identity, or experiences and other experiences. The construction of physical walls and constant definition between spaces divides the experience of place into a jigsaw of compartmentalized boxes leading to nonplaces (Buell). Wright rejects the notion of divided home and split architecture. He writes,

Living within a house wherein everything is genuine and harmonious, a new sense of freedom gives one a new sense of life—as constructed with the usual existence in the house indiscriminately planned and where Life is *contained* within a series of confining boxes, all put within the general box.” (130-133)

As the home is divided into more spaces of “his room” and “her area” the connections to place become as severed tendons too weak to pull together the disparate pieces of meaning, people, or place. By dividing up the world one divides up a sense of identity to the whole home and those who take pause there making, instead of meaning, “broken homes.”

In architectural history there are a variety of moments trending to rectify these barriers of exclusion both of human interaction within place and to the natural setting of place—the environmental site. In his book, The Natural House, Frank Lloyd Wright develops what he calls architectural “integrity” which aims to unify human, house, and environment within the “natural” architecture of home. Wright rejected ancient architecture for its intention to overwhelm humanity by making inhabitants insignificant in designed spaces, causing the individual to recall his sacred insignificance before God. “This empty grandeur was considered to be a human luxury” not meant for humans to settle into and meant, for Wright, humans “develop[ed] an inferiority complex” (134) to architects.

Wright’s response was to scale houses and buildings to function as a comforting extension of humankind. His contemporary focus was to draw attention to the human, to the secular sense of self within place. Wright’s architecture was built to support the activities of man in his natural functions and to incorporate such performances into the integral aspects of site, environment and inhabitants.

A house integral with the nature of materials wherein glass is used as glass, stone as stone, wood as wood—and all the elements of environment go into and throughout the house. Into this new integrity, once there, those who live in it will take root and grow. And most of all belonging by nature to the nature of its being. (Wright 134-135)

Wright’s quote suggests that humans, being a part of the natural environment, require nature in order to “take root and grow.” This sense of home, building off of the ancient plant and tree metaphor used by the Germanic peoples, interprets humans like plants, requiring space and place in which to be cultivated. In other words, the architecture acts as a prop of place which allows the human to cultivate meaning within place through his or her own interactions to the physical world which supports his or her being. Wright concludes, “That

is what should happen to you with a good house that is a *home*. When you are conscious that the house is right and is honestly becoming to you, and feel you are living in it beautifully, you need no longer be concerned about it” (Wright 136). As a home is constructed from natural materials, used as their forms’ expressed purpose (as derived by humans) to shelter and house the human, then the space enables the pause and cultivation of meaning within a natural home. Paradoxically, the more beautiful and apt the construction the more it disappears from consciousness, such that rock, wood, glass become wall, rail, and window. Such transposition creates a space in which the value of Wright’s “integrity” of home is displaced by the function of the elements rather than the cultivation of meaning in place.

Susanka writes of the trends in American housing over the past several decades which have moved away from Wright’s ideals of integrity and have exploded as suburban sprawl made up of McMansions built to impress with size. Disconnected from the earth or the natural world these houses favor sheetrock, laminate wood, and plexiglass. As a reaction to these trends Susanka created her own new concept for home design which she calls “the not so big house,” which emphasizes the importance of architecture reflecting the ideals of home, and the house functioning with the specific purpose of performing place as home: safe and separate from the “outside” world. For Susanka the construct of the house is an effort to establish permanent places that invite the self to pause and create meaning. Like Tuan, she believes that the built environment has the power to “define and refine sensibility.” Susanka also writes of built spaces reflecting the subconscious need to make meaning in the physical world. Echoing these claims Wright records,

Whether people are fully conscious of this or not, they actually derive countenance and sustenance from the “atmosphere” of the things they live in or with. They are rooted in them just as a plant is in the soil in which it is planted. For instance, we

receive many letters from people who sing praises for what has happened to them as a consequence; telling us how their house has affected their lives. They now have a certain dignity and pride in their environment; they see it has a meaning or purpose which they share as a family or feel as individuals. (135)

The architecture is meant as a physical structure which enables the body to perform traditions, rest in identity, and make meaning socially.

Architect Witold Rybczynski examines closely the human relationship to space through the planning and performance of building a house, and inhabiting it physically. Two notions explored extensively by Rybczynski are physical comfort, and sheltered privacy. Over time comfort and privacy have transformed to be incorporated into the definition of home. Beginning in the medieval hall and tracing the home through various places and stages, Rybczynski maps how the home has incorporated the private single family suburban house embedded with the comfort and intimacy that defines our modern definition of home.

Rybczynski connects comfort to mean: satisfaction, tolerable, and sufficient. And in the eighteenth century comfort came to be a sense of contentment (Rybczynski). As homes moved through various stages of physically rendered comfort and security the definition of home evolved socially as well. “Before the idea of the home as the seat of family life could enter the human consciousness, it required the experience of both privacy and intimacy, neither of which had been possible in the medieval hall” (Rybczynski 48). Privacy, a retreat from the public view, was nearly unheard of in the sixteenth century. “Houses were full of people, much more so than today, and privacy was unknown” (Rybczynski 18). Rybczynski notes that home began as communal gathering places of shelter and social contract.

Apprentices lived with their masters, and servants with the family they served. During

medieval times these communal living arrangements often meant everyone sharing a single large bed. Under such conditions there could be no such thing as privacy.

As the bourgeois classes developed and as houses began to be more sturdily built, they also began to be compartmentalized with rooms to divide classes and family members. In these physical divides the idea of private and public spaces began to take shape (Rybczynski). “With this privatization of the home arose a growing sense of intimacy, of identifying the house exclusively with family life” (Rybczynski 39).

In his own exploration of private and public spaces, Morely quotes, “if society has grown more ‘family-oriented’, the family itself has identified more and more squarely with its physical location, the home. “Home” and “Family” are now virtually interchangeable terms” (25). Morely suggests that this privatization is the response of people retreating from the public sphere as a response to a “sense of powerlessness in the spheres of work, politics, and public life” and that such retreat enables a sense of control, identity, attachment, and belonging (Morely 25). While the house is a physical retreat from the public sphere to a domestic sphere, the home cannot be a retreat from the social or cultural; it is created by collective markers of social safety, belonging, identity, and attachment that Morely suggests people seek within the home construct.

Home: The Social Identity

As we have seen thus far, home is socially constructed out of the geography of place, the traditions which create meaning in the pauses of place, and the physical house rendered to contain traditions, and support the human condition. The social constructs of home are interconnected with the aspects of tradition, identity and the physical world. Each aspect

mingles with the every other aspect, every sense of home, to establish it as a place and as a self. Home is the 'hybrid' of self, material, and other, built in place (or person). Together these perspectives function as a single sense of home as place where meaning is conferred by a collective social acknowledgement of belonging.

Culture is the cultivated exchange of people across boundaries of traditions, histories, economies, geographies, space and time. Culture is the process of interpreting the self in the wider context of the world, and is a process of defining the relationships between the tradition of the self and the material manifestations of the self in the physical world. Culture is the place where matter and traditions come together and are performed in relation to others.

Author, teacher, and agriculturalist, Wendell Berry, defines culture in his essay "The Agricultural Crisis as a Crisis of Culture." He writes,

A healthy culture is a communal order of memory, insight, value, work, conviviality, reverence, aspiration. It reveals the human necessities and the human limits. It clarifies our inescapable bonds to the earth and to each other. It assures that the necessary restraints are observed, that the necessary work is done, and that it is done well. (Unsettling of America 43)

This sense of culture is one grown out of time and based on the familiarity of traditions, people and the natural world in place. Berry argues that culture is a product of what time imposes or demands of humankind and by the experiences of humankind.

Essential experience can only be accumulated, tested, preserved, handed down in settled households, friendships, and communities that are deliberately and carefully native to their own ground, in which the past has prepared the present and the present safeguards the future. (Unsettling of America 45)

Berry's sense of culture is tied, rooted, directly with the earth. His sense provides the connection between traditions, personal experience and the landscape, all of which produce

home as a place. But this sense is a romantic ideal disregarding the dominant state or condition of the human population to displacement. Indeed, the one pitfall to Berry's definition is that it fails to incorporate what Cresswell calls "cultural struggle."

If place and landscape are seen in the context of a broad and unitary culture they appear as static and already formed material reflections of a superorganic culture. Places are seen as rooted and intransient. The new cultural geography critiques this view and emphasizes in its place the active constitution of places through cultural struggle. (Cresswell, In Place / Out of Place 13)

Such cultural struggle is manifest in Anzaldúa's book Borderlands / La Frontera. Anzaldúa constructs the *new Mestiza* as a means of engaging with the cultural struggle of being from a place which is a mix of histories, politics, economies, and ethnic races. The cultural struggle of place is the navigation of interconnected, or hybrid, relations within the geography of place.

Lippard writes of this hybridity as an inevitable mix.

Each time we enter a new place, we become one of the ingredients of an existing hybridity, which is really what all "local places" consist of. By entering that hybrid, we change it; and in each situation we may play a different role. [Our] reciprocal identity is inevitably altered by the place, by the relationship to the place itself and the people who are already there. Sometimes the place, or 'nature,' will provide nourishment that social life cannot. (Lippard 6)

As we will see in Chapter 4 of this thesis, identity is the enactment of the cultural struggle within the personal experience. Social experience and cultural expressions of home produce a reciprocal identity, as Lippard claims, requiring a re-evaluation and a re-creation of the self in place, and the place as home. Cresswell suggests that these recreations of home and self produce what geographer Doreen Massey calls "need for routes rather than roots" in order to conceptualize the self in place, culture, time, tradition and the world (Cresswell, Place 49).

Our Planetary Home

From this literature review one sees that there are traditional, physical, and social aspects of place attachment. These three elements together create the intimate sense of place which one calls home. Any sense of a global home must then incorporate these elements. The following chapters look at aspects of tradition, social identity, and physical relations with home to the purpose of setting a framework, scaffolding, upon which one may postulate a global sense of home. As one distinguishes space from place, and identifies meaning in the self as part of the larger world, then the spheres of belonging can potentially translate to a greater sense of self within the world. Our human sense of self begins to know the self as an important entity within the workings of a global system, a planetary home. It is about viewing the world not as an overwhelming scale of “out there space” but the actual connected “right here” relationship of human dependence upon the global ecosystem.

The global home ethic I am striving for is one which steps out beyond the limited local and instead expands to a global-local: a sense of the self within the global ecosystem and exchange for vitality. As one begins to conceptualize the interconnected relationships, and the effects of one’s actions upon the greater scales beyond the self, one is able to participate in a more conscientious and purposeful engagement with the planet as home. Lucy Lippard writes that in order to understand and consider “here” then one must take into account the local geographically, geologically, historically, and presently. She writes, “it must all be considered together, without recourse to nostalgia or amnesia” (Lippard 116). The global-local must take into account what is here now, in our limited range, but also what is beyond our personal experience to the meaning as a collective. Humans must expand beyond the microdefinitions of self when considering place and home.

To understand the self in place one must be able to cultivate the self in place beyond Buell's suggested mapping, circles, archipelagos, mental connections, memory, and change. These aspects are vital to defining place from space, but to know a place, and connect to the landscape and ecosystem, to know the intimate and the planetary, one must know the self through tradition, culture, and physical experience.

CHAPTER 3

VELMA WALLIS: CONSTRUCTING HOME THROUGH TRADITIONS

The term tradition denotes time and the transmission of customs and beliefs over time. Traditions are the performances of events, or rituals repeated over time and infused with meaning, as each performance recalls previous performances and anticipates continued performance. This chapter examines the performance of tradition as a construct of home building a sense of identity within a community, creating a sense of heritage through myths and history, and a sense of context within the physical world. To direct the constructs of tradition and home I examine the life and work of Velma Wallis, a native Alaskan Gwich'in woman.

Velma Wallis was born and raised as the sixth of thirteen children in a two-room cabin nestled in Fort Yukon, Alaska. She was born in 1960, a year after Alaska was made a state, and during a time when “John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. were making big waves” (Wallis, Raising Ourselves 17). Wallis was born at a time of great change, locally, culturally, and historically. Locally the Gwich'in people had begun to settle more permanently into towns such as Fort Yukon. Culturally outside influences of modernity and Western culture were entering their homes bringing English with it broadcast on new radios and televisions. The Gwich'in culture was changing from an isolated band with a specific

heritage to one married and mixed with a variety of other influences. Historically Alaska was transitioning from an isolated military outpost to a land rich with resources and oil that the new government was working to divide up for its benefit and profit.

For Wallis and her Gwich'in people these changes led to the necessity to reexamine and renegotiate a sense of place in their traditional home—the arctic. Modernity challenges any sense of tradition, identity, and heritage. For Velma Wallis the struggle was discovering her traditions and identity before they disappeared with the passing of older generations, the loss of language, and the influx of new influences. In order to preserve her sense of home and heritage, she took upon herself the task of writing down traditional Gwich'in oral stories as well as recording her own experience of growing up Gwich'in in Fort Yukon. Her personal story and the record of the traditional stories are an effort to remember and reestablish a connection to the Gwich'in community, her personal heritage, and to the arctic land she calls home.

Two Traditional Stories

Velma Wallis has interpreted and recorded two traditional stories: Two Old Women, and Bird Girl and the Man who Followed the Sun. These Gwich'in stories were related to her by her mother, as they would fall asleep in their tent on cold winter nights. In the introduction to Two Old Women, Wallis remarks that, “stories are gifts given by an elder to a younger person” and that these gifts can provide a “better understanding of [one’s] past, their people and, hopefully, themselves” (xii). These stories present, for Wallis, a connection to the traditions and values of her native people and provide a sense of identity which helps to

reinstate connections with the Gwich'in community, her personal heritage, and the landscape of her people.

Two Old Women is the story of a group of Gwich'in people, who in the face of starvation during a particularly hard arctic winter, decide to leave behind two old women: Ch'idzigyaak and Sa'. The story follows these two women as they struggle to survive on their own. They face hardships of cold and hunger while struggling with the despair of betrayal and the weariness of aged bodies. Their best chance for survival is the hope of finding an old fishing spot that they remember from their youth as being plentiful with fish and other resources. Driven by their fears of being found by others, and determined not to succumb to death without trying to survive, the two old women find the fishing spot and work to make it a home. As the two old women struggle they find strength in their memories, their skills, and the traditions of their youth, enabling them to hunt, gather, fish, and store away enough food for them, and eventually enough for even those who left them behind.

Similar to Two Old Women, the story of Bird Girl and the Man who Followed the Sun, follows two people and their journeys to find a sense of self and a place within their communities and the arctic landscapes. Jutthunvaa, or Bird Girl, is the only daughter in a Gwich'in family and as such she has been allowed to learn the skills of her brothers and father: to hunt and run rather than the common skills taught to girls: to tan hides, gather herbs, and raise children. Daagoo is a boy from a different Gwich'in band. And while he has learned the skills of other boys, to hunt and run, he is a loner and a dreamer always running off to explore and daydream of one day following the sun to the Land of the Sun, "a warm country to the south where the sun shone all year long" (Wallis, Bird Girl 15).

The story follows Bird Girl as she abandons her family and band to try and survive on her own. In her efforts to hunt caribou she is discovered by a band of enemy hunters, the Ch'eekwaii, who take her to their territory as a prisoner. Bird Girl is imprisoned as a slave, impregnated by her captor, and kept in the village as an "other." After the birth of her son, whom the father, Turak, keeps from her to taunt her, Bird Girl makes no attempt to escape. She lives with the Ch'eekwaii for several years as a slave and misfit until she discovers the murder of her three brothers. The night she discovers her brothers' deaths she waits for her captors to go to sleep and then smothers the whole band of Ch'eekwaii by plugging up the air holes for their homes. Finally she escapes and returns to her territory where a Gwich'in band takes her in.

When the hunters of Daagoo's Gwich'in band are killed by a group of Ch'eekwaii, Daagoo has to lead his people to safety. He teaches the younger boys to hunt and work. Together they survive until they are found by another Gwich'in band who take them in. Then, free to follow his heart, Daagoo follows a map, drawn for him by elders amused by his curiosity, to the Land of the Sun. When he reaches the Land of the Sun he finds love, happiness, and ease. He builds a life with a woman; he learns to hunt and gather and live. But then Daagoo returns home one day to find his wife and children burned by bandits, and in his attempt to avenge their deaths he is nearly killed. When Daagoo is rescued by an old man he is told, "Go home to your people. You have found the sun and known happiness, but now you are empty. You must go back to your own land and fill yourself again" (Bird Girl 188). Daagoo finds that even in the Land of the Sun there is a necessity for traditions and heritage so he takes his journey back to the arctic to find his mother and his Gwich'in people.

For Wallis the stories connect her to the traditions of her heritage. Each story provides the context of why and how her people have survived. Each performs a sense of place by providing a context of heritage and reiterating the customs of the people. They note the migrations and activities performed by the Gwich'in in season with the hunt in order to survive; relating the times and places of their fishing, the trails of the caribou, the location of cranberry bogs, and any number of other activities and resources. Two Old Women provides an extensive list of traditional resources and activities such as hunting and drying meats and fish, tanning and sewing with animal skins for clothing, blankets, tents and sleds, weaving bark for baskets and birch-limb snowshoes. The story relates the construction of traps and tools and everything the people needed to survive. As these customs and traditions are maintained in story, and in the practice of daily life, one feels a sense of belonging to something greater than the self.

Expressed in each story are moral lessons of community value and the necessity of the community for survival. Seeing the traditional structures of life, community, gender roles, and heroism in the stories provides for Wallis a sense of pride in her heritage. Wallis writes in the introduction to Two Old Women, "I was impressed with [the story] because it not only taught me a lesson that I could use in my life, but also because it was a story about my people and my past—something about me that I could grasp and call mine" (xii). Because The Two Old Women, as well as Bird Girl and the Man who Followed the Sun, were stories of her heritage she connected with them as a part of herself, as something she could own. Such stories explained how her people had survived despite the challenges of the arctic, and suggest that they can continue to survive.

With a connection to the land and to a heritage, the stories then provide the basis for establishing what Wallis understands as “home.” As we see from Wallis’s quote above, by recognizing her heritage in the stories she creates a sense of ownership with the stories, the people and the traditions. By accepting the stories as “mine” Wallis begins to build her sense of place through the rules, morals and traditions that the stories convey. While the Gwich’in were traditionally a migratory people, it is their connection to the land, animals, and heritage that is essential for understanding the place that the Gwich’in call home. Recognizing the performances of shared tradition and experience that defines home creates a sense of self and identity with the community, and home.

Each story emphasizes the importance of learning to hunt and gather, skills that have allowed the Gwich’in people to survive in the arctic for generations. Each of the exiled parties, the two old women exiled by their peers, Bird Girl and Daagoo self-exiled, relate the importance of developing these skills in their youth. After killing a squirrel as it ran up a tree, Sa’ reminisces, “Many times I have done that, but never did I think I would do it again” (Two Old Women 21). Bird Girl developed the skills to “run long distances without tiring, leap over fallen trees, and hunt many kinds of animals” (Bird Girl 33). Such skills allowed her to provide food for her family and for others. Skills at gathering food and provisions for the winter made individuals assets to the band; those who did not contribute were seen as disrespectful and dangerous.

The tension of the stories of both Bird Girl and Daagoo is their disregard for the rules set in place to maintain the traditions of their people. Wallis explains that “in these times boys were trained to hunt and scout for animals, while girls were taught to cook, raise children, tan skins, sew, and gather edible plants and medicinal herbs” (Bird Girl 17). These

divisions of labor were meant to ensure that all the work was done so that all the people could survive. Bird Girl and Daagoo, while capable hunters, were unable to fit into the expectations that the tribe had for them and were seen as “other” or outsiders to their people. Bird Girl was too aggressive—beating the boys at their own games, and Daagoo was too distracted—following his imagination to wander and explore the forests and world around him. Their desires and abilities went against traditional roles and thus threatened the survival of the entire group and the Gwich’in home. Wallis explains:

The Gwich’in had lived in the flatlands for thousands of years and had strict rules. For the band to survive, each member had to fulfill his or her duties without question. Obedience was enforced with punishment; people could be banished from the band for refusal to comply with its age-old customs. It was understood that, besides the animals and the land itself, the Gwich’in people needed each other for survival. (*Bird Girl* 22)

In order for everyone to survive they must each be able to rely upon one another. It is essential that each member of the band has a role and that each person performs the tasks that his or her role dictates. Stories taught the people how to engage with the performances of traditions such as hunting or gathering, camping or migrating, enabling those performances to create meaning in place. Such traditions and stories provided people with an identity within their community as well as a within the larger narratives of the people, both past and present. Without these traditions, these place making activities, what the Gwich’in associated as home would begin to break down. To illustrate this breakdown Wallis writes of her personal experience of broken traditions in an effort to regain the sense of home. She recounts her own history of home even as it is constantly under threat of slipping away with the traditions of her people.

The Personal Experience of Tradition

Velma Wallis's experience growing up Gwich'in in the Alaskan arctic provides a contemporary look at the role of traditions in constructing a sense of home and place through heritage. In her autobiography, Raising Ourselves, Wallis details her life growing up in Fort Yukon during a time of encroaching white Western culture, reallocations of lands by the federal government, navigating the native traditions with the modern value systems of education and economy, and the influence of drugs and alcohol on her community and family.

Much of what complicates Wallis's story and identity with the Gwich'in people, and her relationship with the Alaskan Wilderness, are the external influences thrust upon her community. In the stories of The Two Old Women and Bird Girl and the Man who Followed the Sun, the threats to identity and traditions were easily identified in the faces of enemies like the Ch'ekwaii, but for Wallis the enemy is less easily distinguished. William L. Hensley, a prominent Inupiaq leader and co-founder of the *Alaska Federation of Natives*, writes in the foreword to Bird Girl and the Man who Followed the Sun, "the enemy today is the fading of the spirit, the distractions of modern life, the confusion of identity and the loss of language" (10). Certainly these are factors threatening any sense of home and place, but may be particularly felt by those who have a strong sense of identity and heritage built upon ancient traditions. Wallis's own experience growing up Gwich'in exemplifies this notion. What she faces, in her own experience of making sense of home are the distractions of modern life and the confusion of identity, but also a sense of loss from disappearing traditions and the degradation of the environment and ecosystem.

Wallis grew up in a household of fifteen people. Her parents had fourteen children and she was the sixth. She remembers her early years were times when her father would trap and hunt in the winter months and fish in the summer. Her parents would work together, using more traditional means, to provide the food that their family needed throughout the year. While they didn't have much, they did have the means and skills to provide enough, but as time wore on and as modern influences crept into their lives, things began to change. Wallis marks the downward spiral of her family life with the death of an older brother. After his death her parents seemed to give up and began to try and drown out their sorrows and troubles with alcohol.

In the beginning her parents drank only during holidays, but as their sorrows overwhelmed them they turned more and more to the bottle. When Wallis was thirteen her father died from diabetes exacerbated by alcoholism. The spring following her father's death, Wallis notes, a liquor store opened in Fort Yukon and "the combination of monthly welfare checks and the local liquor store gave people like [her] mother carte blanche to drink to their hearts' content" (Raising Ourselves 136). With her mother sober only two weeks a month she and her other siblings found freedom to do as they pleased. Wallis dropped out of school to take care of her younger siblings, while most of her older siblings followed their parents' habits of drinking, though a few married and moved away.

While Wallis and her family suffered from the effects of alcohol and drug addiction, all of Fort Yukon was struggling to survive under the strain of modernization and outside influence. In the early sixties the schools were segregated, "one for the whites, and one for the Natives" (Raising Ourselves 91). The teachers were often prejudiced against the native students and used physical punishment such as spanking to correct them. With white

teachers the children didn't learn the Gwich'in language; instead every student learned and spoke English. The older generations, who did not speak English, couldn't communicate with the younger generations and so traditions and stories stopped being passed down. Wallis herself couldn't speak with her own grandmother, Itchoo, because Itchoo spoke only Gwich'in and Wallis spoke only English.

In addition to the lack of native language education, the children's culture was very different from the elders. Speaking of the distance between herself and her grandmother, Wallis writes, "We never knew that Itchoo had lived in a different culture before the coming of the Western culture, and no one thought to explain this to us" (Raising Ourselves 112). The new Western culture that Wallis was raised on entertained the youth with music on the radio, regular school throughout the fall, winter, and spring, permanent settlement in one locale, food stamps, welfare checks, bootleggers, alcohol, abandoned hunting lines, forest fires, government mineral and resource rights, game wardens requiring permits for hunting, the confusion of media distractions, and broken families.

To add to the confusion of cultural change and lost communication there was the added influence of the U.S. Air Force base stationed a mile above Fort Yukon. For the most part the children saw little of the "clean-cut Air Force boys" who would toss candy during the Fourth of July celebration, or pick up garbage to haul to the local dump during 'breakup' every year, or send someone to the school as Santa (Raising Ourselves 98). But that didn't mean they were without influence. Much of the Air Force influence on Fort Yukon came in the nightlife. At night the enlisted men would frequent the bar looking for female company, and as Wallis explains, "the men of the village were always fighting to hold the interest of the local women, who often preferred the handsome outsiders to the drudgery of village men

and village life” (Raising Ourselves 98). Mixed with alcohol, the tension between the airmen and the locals was often heated and violent. Western culture was mixing in genetically as well as socially.

Fort Yukon itself changed with time and money. In 1970 the U.S. government sent notice to all of the villagers “telling of proposed allotments and land that in the future would be owned by corporations” (Raising Ourselves 119). Such notions were unfamiliar to the Gwich’in community. And as such many, like Velma Wallis’s father, disregarded the notice. They didn’t understand what gave the government the right to split up lands that they had hunted for thousands of years and they saw as their community home. Such influences divided the village and Gwich’in community socially, politically, and economically.

By the time she was sixteen Velma Wallis was fatherless and practically motherless. Depressed and trying to survive she heeded the advice of an elderly woman and went out to her family’s traditional hunting ground, *Neegoogwandah*, in order to learn how to hunt and trap. Her family had abandoned the land when a fire, caused by a clearing crew for the Chalkyitsik airport expansion, got out of hand and “roared toward Fort Yukon” (Raising Ourselves 116). The blaze had burned most of the trap line flushing out the animals that once made the land a home. For years it sat scorched and neglected. But the romantic notion of living off the land as her people had once done, as her parents had once done, caught hold of Wallis’s imagination. In early November she gathered what supplies she could remember her father taking with him on hunting trips, and loaded down with supplies, she headed out to Spider Island amidst her family’s burnt lands.

Early on in her experience out on the land she gave up her notion of hunting and trapping because without help or guidance, other than an old trapping book written by a

“trapper from the lower 48” (Raising Ourselves 116), she was without the experience or ability to catch anything. Instead she filled her time chopping wood, enjoying the solitude and quiet of the land, and making trips back to Fort Yukon to get supplies.

Finally one cold day in March she returned home to find her mother drunk. The only way to get her sober was to lure her out to the hunting lands to stay with Wallis. So after purchasing a small bottle of whisky, as a lure for her mother, Wallis and one of her brothers took their mother out to the camp. For days Wallis nursed her mother back to sobriety. Then Wallis, still itching to gain knowledge, convinced her mother to teach her to trap. For the rest of the winter the two hunted and trapped, and in subsequent years Wallis returned with various members of her family to trap and hunt for their food as supplements to their livelihoods.

The romance of living off the land faded quickly. Wallis burned her hand and foot in the first few days. The first night she used up all her candles and failed to trap anything. When her mother finally showed her how to trap muskrat Wallis was disgusted by the water bugs that shared the muskrat’s home, making her unable to eat much of what she killed and trapped. And while Wallis writes of her time on Spider Island fondly, and as an essential step in healing from years of neglect, her “return to nature as home” is punctuated with return trips to Fort Yukon for supplements of Pilot Boy crackers and canned foods bought with food stamps. Even in her efforts to return to nature and the traditions of her heritage, the contemporary world traveled with her. Her new brand of survival included the modern conveniences of the modern world including books, bug spray, and preservatives; canvas tents, store bought boots, and plastic – instead of moose skins. Even transportation to and from the camp was on the back of a snowmobile. And when the temperatures warmed she

abandoned the camp altogether because it was too hard to survive. “In the summer” she explains, “it was too hard to get clean water” (Raising Ourselves 173).

Velma Wallis’s attempt to return to nature and her Gwich’in traditions provides the illustration necessary to examine the difficulty in building home and maintaining traditions in place under the influence of a modern world. Despite the watered down experience of returning to nature, the lessons learned by Wallis were valuable to her reconnecting to the place as home. When she finally learned to trap she began to understand and reestablish a relationship with nature. She learned to see and accept the ecosystem of her food—the plants and animals of her environment—as well as her place within that sphere. She learned respect for the water bugs that keep the muskrat’s air hole open during the winter. She learned the signs of prey and the tracks of animals. She learned to identify creatures by their habitats and habits. In connecting with the land and her environment Wallis succeeded in establishing the traditions of her people in place and forming her own connection to the place of her heritage and finding her home in the world.

When Wallis presents her story of “returning to her family lands” it is not the same as returning to one’s heritage and customs. Initially she fails in her attempts to return to nature and her heritage in every way. She leaves her family seeking herself in the wilderness. Lacking experience, skills, or knowledge she must be taken to Spider Island by her brother. She requires someone to set up her tent, light a fire, and even brew tea. Even with that done she still does not know what to do herself (Raising Ourselves). She keeps busy by chopping wood but everything else is neglected. She fails to trap anything and she even fails to identify the tracks or animals that have been and will be her food.

However, the success of her efforts grows out of her failures. In reestablishing a relationship to the values and purpose of her traditions she creates a new interpretation of traditions: one where she can create a sense of self while incorporating and accepting the changes of time and progress. Wallis becomes a link carrying the traditional stories of her people forward and providing a new relationship with the past and future which incorporates her own experience of land as home and the traditional skills and values of her people.

For Wallis the balance of home is accepting the conveniences of the modern world while valuing and performing her heritage to the best of her ability. It is recognizing the value of the Gwich'in stories, while accepting that writing them down—a modern influence of story telling—may be the only way to preserve them.

CHAPTER 4

ANZALDÚA: MOBILE HOME IDENTITY

If tradition is a localized performance of culture, then culture is a broad selection of people performing a variety of traditions within a larger community and space. Culture is both more personal and more general than simply tradition. In this chapter I examine the social ramifications of home and how culture influences a sense of the self by addressing the work of Gloria Anzaldúa, a Texas-Mexican-Indian-American—Chicana. Comparatively I also present the essay “A Global Sense of Place” (Massey, Space, Place and Gender 146-156), written by geographer Doreen Massey, which presents culture and place attachment as mobile identities of the Self and the Other.

The work that Gloria Anzaldúa does in her book Borderlands / La Frontera is the work of locating the individual identity of the Self within the context of the cultures that inform identity. This work of connecting identity, what she terms “mediation” (Anzaldúa 52), with culture, land, and heritage is the same work of connecting home with identity. Each aspect of Self, landscape, and home feeds into identity informing and supporting the Self and the Other.

Anzaldúa, Borderlands, the Self, Other, and Home

Home, especially in the United States, has become, over time, a borderland. It is a vague idea quickly being whitewashed by tract housing and a homogenous economic franchise landscape. Gloria Anzaldúa writes,

Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. (25)

Anzaldúa uses the creation of a new identity to redefine her place in the world. She establishes a new model for how to fit into the varieties of culture that she sees as broken and she defines her new model as *the new mestiza*. The new mestiza embraces the parts and people of culture that are neglected or dismissed because of their otherness. By acknowledging and accepting the other within herself, the parts that popular culture deem uncanny, unsavory, weak, or criminal, Anzaldúa is able to accept herself, her real self, her “own intrinsic nature buried under the personality that had been imposed on [her]” (38). By creating a new identity, one that allows for all of the aspects of the self, Anzaldúa internalizes both sides of an “us” / “them” dichotomy. The new mestiza allows her to be both, which in turn allows her an identity without borders.

The structure of Borderlands/La Frontera is a look at home in three stages: it is a history of home, a reflection of the Self (or Home as Identity), and then a return home both physically and emotionally for the author. By encircling the Self within the borders (or bookends) of home, identity becomes the focus for establishing a homeland. The work of the Self is the work of the home.

The opening chapter, “The Homeland,” establishes the setting for the speaker and her self-examination. It presents culture as two working factors in this book: first as the place or location of experience, and second, the body as a landscape, such that the borders and culture are internalized as identity. For our purposes we may consider identity and the Self as a sense of “home.”

“Homeland” begins with a poem that draws out the history of the Mexico and U.S. border tracing the fence that stretches across that expanse and connects the body to the land and the culture to the body. The poem begins with a speaker feeling the elements of the earth mix with her body, wind tugs her sleeve, and her feet sink into the sand. The opening stanza establishes the tension of two worlds: “a gentle coming together / at other times and places a violent clash” (23). This tension is the tension for the book as a whole, a tension of coming together and clashing culturally and physically on the Mexico/ U.S. border. This tension also reflects the tension of home. Home is mimicked by the connection of different elements and experience. Just as the wind and sleeve come together as separate elements interacting with one another, home is the coming together of identity with culture and recognizing their integrated relationship. Sometimes home is a peaceful place; sometimes it is a “violent clash.” The experience of home is an experience of my many levels and in many contradictions.

The poem continues as the speaker describes the land, the children playing in the park, the division of land by the “chainlink fence crowned with rolled barbed wire” (23) as it stretches over nearly 2000 miles from Tijuana to the Gulf of Mexico. Physically the fence is “rusty” and “gritty,” but metaphysically it is an “open wound / dividing a pueblo, a culture, / running down the length of my body, / staking fence rods in my flesh, / splits me splits me”

(23). The fence acts as the symbol of the land and the identities that tear the speaker open and “split” her between history, culture, and landscape. The author claims the fence as “home / this thin edge of / barbwire” (23). And the poem transforms the speaker’s flesh into the landscape turning the “skin” back into the earth. “But the skin of the earth is seamless. / The sea cannot be fenced / el mar does not stop at borders” (23). In three stanzas the speaker is the flesh of the earth, and then the fence is the home of her flesh, and finally the earth is a skin (a body or flesh) of itself that frees the speaker because the skin of the earth cannot be fenced.

The trajectory of these moves outline the structure of the book and the arguments made. First the book deals with the history, a creation of fence that the speaker cannot escape due to the circumstances of birth and heritage. She is born in the land as a native, a Mexican, a Chicano, and the land is tied to the fence, is staked by the fence, and thus it stakes her. Next the speaker claims her home as the fence itself rather than the land that it divides. She is a division, “a thin edge of barbwire” (23). As an other, as someone caught between cultural definition she can claim neither the U.S. nor Mexico as completely home because she is the hybrid made of both places, both cultures, both histories, and both homes. Thus she lives in the middle, as the fence, unable to take sides. And finally there is a separation of the flesh and the self from the land. As the land is freed from fencing, as nature cannot be fenced, that freedom releases all flesh and all landscape, claiming neither side, neither culture but having claim to both sides, both cultures the speaker becomes a “*puente*” a bridge that connects people, cultures, and land as home.

The new mestiza is like the earth, it cannot be fenced. Its consciousness and experience stretch beyond the borders and surpass the confines of the flesh. Home, despite

the Western depiction of it as a house, as a border bound by the proverbial white picket fence, cannot be confined either. It moves with a conscience of experience. Home is made of contradictions. It is bound by the experience of those living within its borders, living within the culture, and yet it is freed by the landscape, and the stories of the flesh, the exchange of goods and services, and expanded by the memories and histories of the people that inhabit it.

Home as Culture and Art

In constructing the self out of culture Anzaldúa acts as a negotiator between the grievances of the past and her hope in the future as a complete and accepted sense of identity both personally and within the larger context of place. One of the ways that Anzaldúa confronts and connects with her varied cultural heritage is through her work in art.

Anzaldúa makes writing her art and as she writes she builds and creates herself. She writes, “a lack of belief in my creative self is a lack of belief in my total self and vice versa” (95). The construction of self in art brings about a construction of self within. The way one treats art is a reflection of how one values the self, and how one treats the self is a reflection of how one values home. In the West, Anzaldúa claims, attitudes towards art are similar to attitudes of home.

Western cultures behave differently toward works of art than do tribal cultures. The “sacrifices” Western cultures make are in housing their art works in the best structures designed by the best architects; and in servicing them with insurance, guards to protect them, conservators to maintain them, specialists to mount and display them, and the educated and upper classes to “view” them. Tribal cultures keep art works in honored and sacred places in the home and elsewhere. They attend them by making sacrifices of blood (goat or chicken), libations of wine. They bathe, feed, and clothe them. The works are treated not

just as objects, but also as persons. The “witness” is a participant in the enactment of the work in a ritual, and not a member of the privileged classes. (Anzaldúa 90)

The home has been treated in this same manner. Instead of museums though, our homes have been “housed” in cul-de-sacs, and planned unit developments all designed by architects and real estate investors. We service them with insurance and gated communities to protect them, gardeners to maintain them, designers and interior decorators to display them, and the educated and upper classes to “live” in them.

In contrast, as Anzaldúa states, in tribal cultures the home, like art, is an honored place of tradition. The home is bathed, fed, and clothed along with the family, and the community. The home is not merely an object but a witness participating in the ritual of the family. The tribal experience of “home” is one of emotion tied to place by the shared experience between family and friends. The sense of coming home is then to reencounter that witness of love and memory.

This claim may seem contradictory, especially following Velma Wallis’s account of her own tribal family falling apart. But what we explore in tradition is that as the tribal experience maintains home, then it is a shared emotional experience of security and belonging. When that traditional experience breaks down with abuse, neglect, or the infusion of outside influences, as is the case with Wallis, then the home cannot function as Anzaldúa or Wallis prescribe a traditional/ tribal home to work. It becomes broken, broken by the lost traditions, broken by the abuse, neglect and disconnect. When tradition and attention are maintained the home works as Anzaldúa describes art to work, not as *mere* objects, but entities with “identity,” a “‘who’ or a ‘what’ [that] contain the presences of persons, that is, incarnations of gods or ancestors or natural and cosmic powers” (89). The home, like art,

like writing, shares an identity linked through time and memories fed and nourished by the stories of place, and the experience of place. When home is “enacted,” enriched by its inclusion in the stories of place, then it is fed with such memories.

What Anzaldúa argues is that there is a lack of exchange between the art (or home) of Western culture and the people of Western culture. “White America has only attended to the body of the earth in order to exploit it, never to succor it or to be nurtured in it” (90). The home has been expected to maintain its spiritual and emotional value while being stripped of the exchange that feeds such aspects. The sense of the home has atrophied in its relegation as an object easily mined, milled, and marketed. Home, like invoked art, “is communal and speaks of everyday life. It is dedicated to the validation of humans; that is, it makes people hopeful, happy, secure” (Anzaldúa 89) when it is acknowledged in the exchange and communion of sheltering and nurturing life.

Without identity with home there are negative effectss, which Anzaldúa explains, “propel one towards a search for validation” (89). This search for validation is an individual exploit that tarnishes the balance between the individual and the whole community of home. It has the individual looking outside the home to conquer other cultures for the validation of the self, for the power of the self. Anzaldúa argues that such conquests for the self have rendered the Anglo of Western culture “sterile” as reflected in the “white sterility they have in their kitchens, bathrooms, hospitals, mortuaries and missile bases” (91). Sterility brought on by individual exploits is reflected in the home, the health, and death of Western culture. Because the home has been neglected as an object, rather than a witness, the cultural identity of home has been lost to the borderlands. Home is a vague construct tied to the house, tied to

the nurturing of the family, tied to security and safety, but undermined of its true value and meaning due to the unnatural boundaries incorporated into the Western idea of home.

The unnatural expectations of the home, those that create unnatural boundaries and thus a split from the nurturing aspect of home, form in the search for validation outside the self, outside the home. But what brings about the search for validation? Certainly part of the search is brought on by a lack of exchange between culture and home. But it is also brought on by the contradictions of home. We learn from our earliest stages of life that home is meant to be a place of nurturing, a place of safety, and a place of belonging, but what happens when home cannot provide those things? What happens in the home where rape, abuse, and neglect are the mainstay? Western culture fails to cultivate the space for contradiction.

In these questions rest the anxiety, the duality of home; that in the secure places, in the places where one belongs, there is also the trouble from which one seeks refuge. Anzaldúa writes of one student she taught, when confronted with the term “homophobia,” suggesting it meant “fear of going home” (42). Anzaldúa comments, “Fear of going home. And of not being taken in. We’re afraid of being abandoned by the mother, the culture, *la Raza*, for being unacceptable, faulty, damaged” (42). Fear creates the space for contradiction. Fear perpetuates and propels the individual to look outside of the home for validation. Homophobia is not such a poor term for the fear of the home if broken into homo / phobia. There is a fear of not being the same. Not being the same results, in most cultures, as grounds for rejection.

Because Anzaldúa comes from a variety of cultures that have been ignored or devalued: Indian conquered by Cortez, Mexican conquered by the Americans, American

dismissed for race, Woman dismissed for gender, Lesbian dismissed for sexuality, she is forced to reconcile these identities within her Self. In order to have place for all of the labels and cultures of her identity she constructs a self that includes all these cultures and values all of her heritage; this new identity she names the *new Mestiza*. The identity of the new mestiza is an acceptance of the incongruities and the contradictions of race, religion, sexuality, discrimination, and social emotional turmoil brought about by the construction of borders, the labels of “other” and the reactionary displacement of what and who is “outside.” This new sense of identity creates a secure sense of home, one that includes the familiarity of all change and allows for the rest and security of home to reside within the identity of the Self. As home is part of one’s sense of self it becomes mobile, like the turtle’s shell, home goes with the Self, wherever it wanders.

The new mestiza is comparative to geographer Doreen Massey’s construction of home as a global sense of place.

Doreen Massey’s Mobile Global Home

Geographer Doreen Massey’s paper, “A Global Sense of Place,” presents an examination of place that allows for a new conceptualization of place and locality, one that works to incorporate a global sense of place. For Massey place is a mobile constellation of social relationships, cultures, histories, and experiences intersecting at locales which she terms ‘place.’

The place she presents is not static but a constantly changing mix of people and experience performing place over and over with every interaction. This construction of place breaks down the social stagnation of rootedness which presents place as having a “single,

essential, identity” (Massey, Space, Place, and Gender 147). The problem with a fixed perception of place, Massey notes, is that it tends to require the drawing of boundaries which set up the dichotomy “us” and “them” (Massey 152). Where there is a boundary that establishes a sense of “us” and “them” often people’s concept of place form as a reaction to “the Other” segregating and distancing exchange or the possibility of exchange. And it is a collective exchange of experience and understanding that Massey promotes as a “progressive” sense of place, one that incorporates rather than segregates (Massey).

Without a single “unique” identity place diminishes the threat of invasion by “the Other” and diminishes the reactionary division of boundaries. Yet even with broken down physical boundaries the mobility of place is not equal. Different people experience movement through the world differently. Massey explains, women may be restricted in their movement by the threat of physical harm or by the ogle or another’s eye. And the power to move in the world is not evenly distributed. A jumbo jet may pass over the Pacific in a day allowing businessmen the freedom of conducting business internationally. However, the islands that the planes fly over are losing contact with the outside world for business, shipping, or pleasure opportunities (Massey 148). Finally the “undocumented migrant workers from Michoacan in Mexico, crowding into Tijuana to make a perhaps fatal dash for it across the border into the U.S. to grab a chance of a new life” (149) shows the disparity of mobility between existing physical, political, and social borders. How then can people, despite inequality, gain power of identity with place without the restrictions of boundaries? This dilemma is termed “time-space compression” and there are many who have written about the problem; Massey addresses it as follows:

Many of those who write about time-space compression emphasize the insecurity and unsettling impact of its effects,

the feelings of vulnerability which it can produce. Some therefore go on from this to argue that, in the middle of all this flux, people desperately need a bit of peace and quiet – and that a strong sense of place, of locality, can form one kind of refuge from the hubbub. So the search after the ‘real’ meanings of places, the unearthing of heritages and so forth, is interpreted as being, in part, a response to desire for fixity and for security of identity in the middle of all the movement and change. (Space Place and Gender 151)

What is most useful in combating the inequality of place mobility is the embrace of the change and mobility that moves through locations. Rather than reject or dismiss the hubbub that seems to create a sense of flux, Massey suggests that these are the things that make a rich and whole sense of place and identity within the global sphere. She presents her own local shopping center, “Kilburn High Road,” as an illustration of mobile identity within place. Her example includes international newspapers readily available, posters advertising various religious gatherings and national events, the theaters presenting movies, singers, and performers from around the world, shops of international commerce—saris from India, and overhead planes flying in and out of Heathrow airport carrying travelers to and from various distant destinations. Massey’s sketch shows that no place is ever a “seamless, coherent, [or] a single sense of place which everyone shares,” (153) but a multitude of identities offering a richness of experience and connection to the whole world.

Engaging in place as personal identity allows place to be filled with the multiple identities, cultures, and social relations of the people, communities and histories that inhabit place. Thus place becomes a “constellation of social relations meeting and weaving together at a particular locus” (154). Specificity of place is then “continually reproduced” (156) by the mixture of people, relationships, economies, cultures, etc. engaged in the locale of a place. Within the network of relationships identities incorporate the Self with the Other as a

complex but unified identity of accumulated histories. The self is a mobile place—a home—always constructing and performing itself in place.

Conclusions

Both Massey and Anzaldúa construct a sense of place through the exchange and engagement of cultural interactions. As one experiences such interactions one develops a sense of identity born out of exchange between the Self and the Other. This sense of identity creates what is recognizable and familiar which we interpret as home.

As the Self performs “The Self” in place, it becomes an identity marked by the interactions and place-making activities created in place. Just as the home is born out of place-making activities, the performance of such activities inform the self of a connection to the locale, the people, the exchanges, the traditions, and the time of such acts. Like Velma Wallis, Anzaldúa values the traditional, the “tribal” inheritance of connection to place. She sees the value in performing place over time and attending to the traditions of a culture or a people. These things cannot be separated out from the identity of the self in place. What Anzaldúa and Massey add to the sense of tradition required for a sense of home is the acceptance of a global and interconnected world. No longer do people live in isolation free from the exchange across cultures and traditions.

Wallis strives to maintain the past, to keep traditions and the stories of her heritage alive; Anzaldúa is working under that same necessity, to lay claim to the past, but she is also working to expand her sense of self in the interconnections of exchange. Just as Wallis’s family could not stem the tide of Western influence, Anzaldúa cannot maintain a homogeneous culture with a single history. The earth remains the same but the people, the

histories, and the relationships change. By internalizing home and expanding the self to reconcile the past with the present Anzaldúa is able to navigate the influences of change and culture while maintaining a sense of tradition.

Building on a sense of the self as a center for home, Massey creates the space required to allow tradition and change to grow up together. In a global exchange, if place and home are satellites, then one may maintain the traditions of the self and maintain a sense of history, without the threat of the Other. This conception of home allows for the autonomy of the self while enabling that self to exchange and grow in cultivated connections to other people and places.

Returning Home

The final chapter of Borderlands / La Frontera is about returning home. While much of the book is engrossed in the conceptual experience of the self the last pages root the exploration of memory, identity, and traditions in the physical ground of home. Anzaldúa recounts a memory of planting seeds as a child,

Below our feet, under the earth lie the watermelon seeds. We cover them with paper plates, putting *terremontes* [rocks] on top of the plates to keep them from being blown away by the wind. The paper plates keep the freeze away. Next day or the next, we remove the plates, bare the tiny green shoots to the elements. They survive and grow, give fruit hundreds of times the size of the seed. We water them and hoe them. We harvest them. The vines dry, rot, are plowed under. Growth, death, decay, birth. The soil prepared again and again, impregnated, worked on. A constant changing of forms, *renacimientos de la tierra madre*. (113)

This conclusion to the book plants the writer and reader with the watermelon seed. The identity of home is a connection between the physical body and the Self performing identity

within the physical bounds of local exchange. Home is then a performance of place, place is a performance of tradition, tradition is a performance of identity to the pause and the exchange in place. All of these performances are located in the physical world. It is the physical bounds of our connection to place that gives weight to the meaning of home. Even Anzaldúa who claims the freedom from place, from home, must return to the physical markers of home. She is weighed down by her physical connection to the earth just as the rocks hold paper plates over the watermelon seeds. The return home is the connection to the last aspect of Self: the self connected as a physical being, rooted in the physical performance of place to the physical world, inescapable from this place, this home, this planet.

The following chapter explores the home as a physical place through the work of poet and essayist Mary Oliver. Oliver's work connects self physically and literally to the earth as home.

CHAPTER 5

MARY OLIVER: MATERIAL HOME, THE PHYSICAL NATURE OF HOME

Naturally should you want to really live in a way and in a place which is true to this deeper thing in you, which you honor, the house you build to live in as a home should be (so far as it is possible to make it so) integral in every sense. Integral to site, to purpose, and to you. The house would then be a home in the best sense of that word. This we seem to have forgotten if ever we learned it. Houses have become a series of anonymous boxes that go into a row on row upon row of bigger boxes either merely negative or a mass nuisance. But now the house in this interior or deeper organic sense may come alive as organic architecture. (Wright, The Natural House 130)

Every home is set within a space or environment, and the physical elements of a place influences home: our perceptions or understanding of what it means to be home. This chapter is an exploration of home and the connection to landscape to the physical world around us through the poetry and prose of author Mary Oliver. Oliver's work is closely tied to the physical world. Her poems are filled with her observations of nature in connection with her life and home. Her construction and understanding of home comes through her experience with and expression of the waves, and the woods, the ponds, and the turtles, birds, and spiders, and flowers that she has come to know intimately through her extensive, and diligent daily walks through the world around her. The natural world frames and fills

Oliver's perspective and her work frames this paper's perspective of the physical world, nature, landscape, and environment as home.

Though her collection of works is vast, this chapter focuses on Oliver's book Winter Hours, which is a collection of essays that sketch a broad understanding of home, and her poem "On Losing a House" from her collection What Do We Know: Poems and Prose Poems. The essays and poems selected provide insight into her "private and natural self" and express her own discoveries in, what she calls, "the fields of the spirit," which also allow the "human house" to sing (Winter Hours xii). The introduction, written by Oliver, to Winter Hours provides a link between soul and nature, body and experience with home.

Because this thesis works to explore the construction of home through various perspectives, we must explore how one makes the connection to the physical world. Oliver writes in her essay "Winter Hours," from which the book takes its title,

Through these woods I have walked thousands of times. For many years I felt more at home here than anywhere else, including our own house. Stepping out into the world, into the grass, onto the path, was always a kind of relief. I was not escaping anything. I was returning to the arena of delight. (96)

This chapter will help to illuminate the connection that Oliver forges between land and home. In her essay, "Building the House," Oliver connects the physical world with the metaphysical world by constructing parallels between the physical manifestations of ideas—writing and language—and the self in physical construction of her house. Oliver's poem, "On Losing a House" presents a contrast between the physical house and the meaning built within that place as home. And concluding Oliver connects home in her essay "Winter Hours," to the self a work of experience and consideration upon the home and life she has built over the years.

Building the House

In her opening essay “Building the House,” Oliver does much of the metaphorical work needed to tie house and home—the construction of house and home—to the labor of building the self and home through physical labor and through language. She illustrates the connection of construction in the physical sense through her own experience of building a small shed, which she calls a house and describes as, “a miniscule house, a one-room, one-floored affair set in the ivies and vincas of the backyard” (Winter Hours 4). Literally the essay also illustrates the construction of language through her explanation and physical action of writing. For Oliver writing is not so much an action but a “posture of deliberate of hapless inaction” (Winter Hours 5). The body, she claims, is meant to take action and to build and create in this world, “for we are first of all creatures of motion” (Winter Hours 4). On the other hand, the mind requires time to sit and watch, sort and wonder, and look.

She began construction on her house after months of teaching and being “responsible, sedate, thoughtful and, for most of the daylight hours, indoors” (Winter Hours 5). Building the house was a response, a need for activity, to balance out the sedentary work of writing. The dualities created by Oliver—the motion of construction with the posture of writing, the physical world and the literal world—provide the tensions that shape the motion of the essay.

The journey the essay takes through its exploration of house and home begins at the talent to construct the thing. There are skills one must learn and tools one must use in order to construct a house or a written work. Oliver describes a young man she knows who can build anything, “a boat, a fence, kitchen cabinets, a table, a barn, a house” and she explains that he has a great talent to complete his work, “serenely, and in so assured and right a manner, that it is a joy to watch him” (Winter Hours 3). To coincide with his construction of

homes is his labor at writing; working out the puzzle of words provides a pleasure for him. Oliver explains, “In building things, he is his familiar self, which he does not overvalue. But in the act of writing he is a grander man, a surprise to us, and even more to himself. He is beyond what he believed himself to be” (Winter Hours 3). The grander self, as I am interpreting it, is an added layer of meaning that can only be ascribed through language. The exploration of the world in words, and the exercise of language and meaning draw out significance and purpose beyond the act of physical construction. This introduction to the essay provides the reader with a model for building a home. It begins in the concrete world, the physical and tangible which may be easily observed, a man building a house, and then moves to the abstract of construction, using words to create ideas and identity with those ideas.

From the young man the essay leads the reader to the town, the place, where Oliver builds her house. She explains, “when anything is built in our town, it is more importantly a foundation than a structure” (Winter Hours 6). Once a building is in place it is never torn down despite the laws, or neighbors, or anything because, as she says, “On our narrow strip of land we are a build-up, add-on society” (Winter Hours 6) which allows for the ugly, crooked, and nonconforming buildings to grow up in place. Even her crooked house has “undeniable value: it exists” (Winter Hours 6). The significance of having a foundation, even a small shed which, in the end serves little purpose, is another way of expressing the necessity of having a home. The house, the material, the paint and details are insignificant, but the foundation provides a sense of place. The foundation of a structure, or the foundation of home, provides a leaping off point, a canvas available to construct with specific articulation.

The shed is also a symbol of the creative expression of the self. It molds and changes as the creator works and redrafts it. An essay, a life, a house, a person: these are foundations that can be built-up and added to. The material existence, the structure, the framework and the mass, together, create value. These elements build home, they provide the physical symbols of the value and performance of place-making activities. Oliver values them because they exist tangibly.

Oliver directs the essay from the place to the means of building her house by describing her “motley assortment of hand tools: hammer, tack hammer, drivers of screws, rasps, planes, saws small-toothed and rip, pliers, wrenches, awls” (Winter Hours 6). These tools work to build home in two ways. Obviously they are the means to build her house. Each provides the necessary elements to rip and join the physical world, to work it into the shape of a house. The tools allow the crafter to create. Their second means of building home is their history. The tools link the crafter, in this case Oliver, to the past with the history of their existence, and the places they have helped to construct before.

The tools Oliver uses once belonged to her grandfather, and her great-grandfather who was a cabinet-maker. She explains that her great-grandfather “built his own coffin, of walnut, and left it, to be ready when needed, with the town mortician. Eventually, like the tiniest of houses, and with his body inside, it was consumed by flame” (Winter Hours 6). It is curious that though the tools live on and work to build home after home, the houses they create are temporary. The construction of house through physical materials is an act of failure. Every physical structure will fall or fail. It is the nature of life held within physical objects. Over time rust and moth, wind and rain, the physical elements of the physical world corrupt itself. Home, however, while made manifest in the physical structure, remains in a

multitude of form. Like matter, always conserved though in various stages and forms, home changes with time, construction, decay, and reiteration. Home is a process performed and reformed like any physical matter.

Just as tools connect time and people homes connect time and people. The final “tool” addressed by Oliver is help from “a friend, or acquaintance, or even a stranger” (Winter Hours 7). Just as the woodworking tools connect Oliver to her family history, even as the tools model and manipulate the relations of the physical world, the aid offered by people are tools connecting Oliver to the physical necessity of others. The people who help build a home create a new history weaving its way through each life it touches. The connection to others may be small but it is vital to the completion of the house. Without the help of others, physical exertion to tighten screws or life rafters, Oliver would be unable to complete the work of her house, or her home.

When the construction of home is a personal physical act, then the builder pays attention to the details, the material that goes into the construction. Oliver writes,

The material issue of a house, however, is a matter not so much of imagination and spirit as it is of particular, joinable, weighty substance—it is brick and wood, it is foundation and beam, sash and sill; it is threshold and door and the latch upon the door. (Winter Hours 8)

Oliver steers the essay heavily into the physical world of construction material. She explains that her house is built from salvaged material found at “the (then-titled) dump” (Winter Hours 9). The pages at this stage of the essay are filled, line upon line, with materials and objects. “Clothes, furniture, old dolls, old high-chairs, bikes; once a child’s metal bank in the shape of a dog, very old; once a set of copper –bottomed cookware; ...Christmas cards,

...three hundred mattresses” (Winter Hours 9) and so much more. The physical world fills the dump as waste from the world, and fills the essay as bounty for the house.

It was pine I looked for, with its tawny pattern of rings, its crisp knots, its willingness to be broken, cut, split, and its fragrance that never reached the air but made the heart gasp with its sweetness. Plywood I had no love of, though I took it when I found and used it when I could, knowing it was no real thing, and alien to the weather, and apt to parch and swell or buckle, or rot. Still I used it. My little house was a patchwork. It was organic as a garden. (Winter Hours 10)

The supplies that construct the house are like plywood, a mix of things, they come together to form a real thing, a house, as patchwork as it might be. What is the benefit of this organic construction? It binds the real work of the world, the definite measurements of a linear world, with the imagination creating a space of house and home. Beauty is found in the variety of materials, the welcoming of so much into such a small space for such a greater purpose.

It is important to notice the history of the physical objects that Oliver uses in her construction. Just as the tools Oliver uses to craft the home, the materials she uses come with a history. The house is built with, and from, castoffs. (Though the tools may be a type of heirloom object, they are still castoffs, given up in death or discarded when age has made them no longer useful to the owner.) Materials, from other places, and materials in place, function only as temporal objects: easily added, replaced, or discarded. What is important in looking at the material of the house is that all material has a history. While Oliver’s materials have an explicit previous life, or use, all objects—cut from the Earth—have a history. An awareness of history—the tree before the plank—allows the self an identity and relationship with the physical world, an organic world, or what architect Frank Lloyd Wright might call “integrity,” dust before the being. Home is matter filled with physical history,

meaning, and the weight of existence. It is matter working together as builder and built to construct a purpose for the whole. What purpose? Affection and awareness—Home.

From all of this work, effort, and deliberation one would expect the house to *do* something. But Oliver writes, “I hardly used the little house...its purpose never was to be shelter...I built it *to build it*, stepped out over the threshold, and was gone” (Winter Hours 11). What then are we to make of this essay and the efforts of constructing the house?

The conclusion Oliver draws from her construction is an “affection for wood that is useless, that has been tossed out, which merely exists, quietly, wherever it has ended up” (Winter Hours 12). Her appreciation for the “useless” wood is a way to back track through the physicality of the structure: house made of planks, planks made of trees, trees grown from sun, soil, and seed; and examine the purpose and connection to the physical world through the new lens of home. Her affection for wood takes the reader into the woods to a fallen maple that no longer catches the wind, but acts as a fallen “wooden palace lying down, now, upon the earth, like anything heavy, and happy, and full of sunlight, and half asleep” (Winter Hours 13). For Oliver everything physical is a manifestation of the self physically in place in the world.

Though the essay is filled with the bustle of building a single house it ends in a place of rest, far from the house, in nature, at a natural resting spot. It draws the individual out from the walls, over the threshold of the house, and into the woods, the material of life and landscape, self and home. Oliver equates herself to the fallen tree by blending in as “[butterflies] do not recognize [her] as anything very different from this enfoldment of leaves, this wind-roarer, this wooden palace lying down” (Winter Hours 13). The builder is

the material, one home as much like the next, human and tree both material for the embodiment of the place.

“On Building a Home,” is an essay that reflects the architecture of building place out of space. The ambiguous natural world molded to shelter the self under wood, stone, and glass. The structure, while unused by Oliver for such a purpose, nevertheless performs as any place-making activity. It creates a pause in place. It creates, through its construction, a sense of home through the manipulation of materials and the activity of pausing in location for the purpose of building meaning.

If building a house is about performing home in place, then Oliver’s poem, “On Losing a House” is the act of defining home in place through language and meanings ascribed to objects of felt value, which often, are unnoticed until lost or displaced.

A Reading of “On Losing a House”

The poem, “On Losing a House,” is taken from Mary Oliver’s book What Do We Know: Poems and Prose Poems, which was published in 2002. This poem has been selected because it deals with the physical house and the meaning built within as revealed by the loss of home. The physical house is defined by the material characteristics of its construction (and decay) as well as the material comforts that fill the space of a home. The meaning of home is revealed by the experiences and imagination of the speaker, all the time spent in the house creating memories of ghosts, seasons and affection for the place of home.

“On Losing a House” is briefly summed up, just as the title suggests, as a story of the speaker losing the home she was renting to new owners who displace the speaker and her family. The poem is broken into seven numbered sections, a single stanza each, that detail different aspects of the process of constructing and losing a home.

The initial stanza of the poem, section one, opens not on the speaker, or a house, but on bumble bees. This section provides a space for comparison of home, natural and human. The setting undertakes the problem of the whole poem: how does one define home? Stanza one describes the bumble bee as knowing its home. “They have memorized / every stalk and leaf / of the field” (3-5.30). The bees know where in the landscape their home exists. The tone of the first section confidently points out that the bees “fall from the air at / exactly / the right place” (6-8.30). Their precision demonstrates their knowledge and performance of where home is located and how to get there. But for all of the assurance created in tone and language, the home created by the speaker for the bumble bees is undefined and delicately abstract. “They crawl / under the soft grasses, / they enter / the darkness” (9-12.30), the home the bees know so well, though clearly marked by their flight pattern and grass, is constructed of only darkness. The darkness of home may be a soft, quiet home; it may be easily explored or slowly enlightened with the understanding of what it means to be there; or it is a threatening empty place without definition or understanding, and easily crushed or destroyed by light and exposure. The opening of the poem performs the function of creating a space to allow the poem, and the reader, to create home. Home is darkness; a void that the speaker does not know and the rest of the poem must identify, define, and value.

Sections two and three work to define the darkness of home by focusing on the physical aspects relating to the speaker’s specific house when she asks, “Where will we go” (14.30). This question is then followed up by a deflection of concern from the self to the material objects that fill the space of home: “TV, PC, VCR, / our cat / [...] our dishes and our blue carpets” (18, 22.30) etc. Rugs, and shades, and cats, where will they be placed? The collection of items define the “we” in the poem, the speaker, the “we” and “our,” are wedded

in the stanza to the belongings. “Where will we go / with our table and chairs” (14-15.30) and all the other things collected that define how big or small a new home must be. There is a grief associated with the worry of physical belongings, the need to have a place for all the physical markers of home. Where will the speaker find a home that has windows to fit the “rice-paper shades,” or rooms that will fit the “blue carpets” (30)? The objects placed within it, just as the “we” is defined by what must be moved and accommodated in the next home, define the space of home.

As stanza two defines the physical objects, section three creates the physical structure of house. Through the nostalgia of the speaker for the house, “We never saw / such a beautiful house” (27-28.31), the speaker tries to define the house as a manifestation of home through its physical flaws or qualities. “It dipped toward the sea,” and “it shook and creaked,” it let the rain in, and “had a ghost” (29-32.31). These characteristics of the house made the speaker love the house as a home. The characteristics provided vitality and beauty to the house, creating for the speaker a presence about the house. The poem thus creates, or builds, a home out of the people, the possessions, and the presence within it. But just as the home is seeming to take shape, just as the darkness of home is beginning to be defined and lit, a problem is presented: money.

Because home seems to be encapsulated in the physical objects of the world, and because the physical world is valued in terms of commodity and money, the house, the symbol of home, and the objects of home, must be maintained by means of economic exchange. In the case of this poem, the house is caught as a commodity and as a symbol that leads the speaker to lament, “O, what is money? / O, never in our lives have we thought / about money.” (40-42.31). Money stretches the tensions of the poem in two directions: first

to the need for money to own and maintain a house, or be displaced from the home, and the other to the ways that money flattens the house of character. On the one hand the speaker acknowledges that money provides the means for someone else, “who already has money” to “sign the papers” and “turn the key” (47, 50-51.31). Money can maintain a home, and provide the owner with the security of ownership. But it can also work against the residents for whom without money the home may be lost. As in this case, money takes the home from the speaker because she has only worried about constructing the home, and her lack of commodity savings exiles her from the house.

Though money is a solution to the owning the house in section four, it is the demise of the home in stanza five. The house loses the characteristics that were its best defining qualities of a physical sense of home for the speaker when the new owners remodel and repair the house. The speaker relates, “up go the / sloping rooflines, out goes the / garden, down goes the crooked, / green tree, out goes the / old sink, and the little windows [...] and there goes / the ghost”(56-60, 62-63.32). Money provides the means of constructing the house to be “like any other” (line 62) house which then destroys the unique characteristics that make the home. What is home now but everything else? What is everything but a new fragile type of darkness needing definition? As the physical aspects are tossed aside the speaker doesn’t tell us what replaces those features. The house is described by loss, and not what is added to it thus leaving the reader in the darkness of how the house now appears. Money from this point of view flattens and destroys the house rather than maintaining it by discarding all the aspects that the previous stanza’s worked to identify.

What have the tensions of building and losing a home brought to the speaker? Stanza six shifts the poem tonally from worry to anger, assurance, and grief. The speaker seems to

have a definite sense of the value of things. She states, no longer questioning or dreaming, but grieving, “don't tell us / how to behave in / anger, in longing, in loss, in home- / sickness” (74-77.32), her knowledge of love, grief, and value of home create a home-sickness, one which connects the emotional attachment of self to the physical place of home. “Home-sickness” separated by the lines of the poem enacts the displacement of the speaker from the home she has constructed and loved. All of the “anger,” “longing,” and “loss” remains “in home” and the sickness falls away. While the speaker feels this motion mimicked by the lines of the poem, what remains intact is the home. While it is the site of anger, longing, and loss, such emotion remains as part of the function, even the nature, of home. There is hope that the “sickness” will leave in time and the speaker will regain all that is home. Though home and sickness are displaced there is a sense of resolve of re-placement in the insistence of the speaker to not be told, “don't tell us,” implying she already knows.

Finally section seven works to resolve the empty space of being without a physical home. The house and the speaker must each find a new sense of home, so each says “goodbye” to the other. The poem turns fantastically back to nature as the house “lifted itself / down from the town, and set off / like a packet of clouds across / the harbor [...] and turned / lightly, wordlessly / into the keep of the wind / where it floats still / [...] on the black and dreamy sea” (82-91.33). The poem turns to the landscape to make sense of home, but the whimsical tale of the house moving out to sea is a curious turn for this home narrative. What can be taken from this turn is a compellation of two points; first the reader is taken back to a world where bees live, the natural world where home, so often, is built in darkness. The idea of house floats out to a place of imagination—on the “dreamy sea”—where it remains in the

memory of the place. For the speaker the home will always exist as she created it, though physically it is now changed.

Second, the fantastical turn of events provides for the reader a sense of home beyond the tangible or the commodity aspects of home. The house is constructed out of the physical objects and can be only temporary, passing away with the value of money, or the exchange of ownership. But the aspects of home created from the darkness of the imagination live on. For example, the ghosts, who were never tangible, “glide over / the water, away, waving and waving / their fog-colored hands” (63-65.32). The ghosts leave the site of the house but remain an entity in the landscape, becoming literally entwined with the fog on the waves, waving fog-colored hands. They haunt the place where the house, eventually, finds itself just as the speaker will haunt the idea of the home she once had. The ghosts and the waves and the speaker and the home end up entangled as a single dream in the place, in the waves and the wind, and the natural elements that help to define the darkness of home.

Nestling the poem in a place of landscape—between the fields of the bees and the waves of the dreamy sea—the poem sets home in a physical world, but defines it as an illusive and personal place. The landscape marks location, like the bee’s grasses marking the entrance to the darkness, the landscape marks the place of emotional and mental maps for home. The physical objects of the house define the space and the “darkness” of home, the emotional meaning of home is housed between the physical experience in the place of emotional and fantastical experience. The landscape provides a text for home, a context and instruction for building home; one needs only to look around at the creatures living in the place to see and know how to make a house. The bee knows the leaf and fields, the fish know the ocean and streams, a raven knows the desert, and their intimacy with these places

defines the darkness. No matter the setting, the earth is and provides the means to house any that will learn to make their home here.

Home Potential

The conclusion of this chapter is a brief account of the connection Oliver builds between, what she terms, the soul and the landscape. Oliver writes in her essay “Home,”

It is one of the perils of our so-called civilized age that we do not yet acknowledge enough, or cherish enough, this connection between soul and landscape—between our own best possibilities, and the view from our own windows. We need the world as much as it needs us, and we need it in privacy, intimacy, and surety. (Long Life 91)

For Oliver the internal, emotional, and meaningful understanding of the self, and culture, and home comes from her observations and interactions with the physical world. She writes, “I am sensual in order to be spiritual” (Winter Hours 100). The awareness of the body as a physical, sensual entity allows for the meaning that is brought about by the exchange of bodies. Whether or not it is “spiritual” for one or another is not the point so much as the senses, in contact with the physical world, confirm that the individual is a small entity in a greater scheme of life and the cycles. Human is one form of life in the world of physical existence.

The essay “Winter Hours” provides a map to the connection that Oliver has created with the place she calls home, and to conclude I briefly summarize some of her points that specifically indicate physical connection to place.

The first aspect of home in place is to be known, and not simply to know. It is one thing to know a place, where things are or what things are called, it is another thing to be

known in that place. For Oliver being known is having the trees where she walks recognize her. She explains her recognition by these Others of the physical world as follows:

Eventually I began to appreciate—I don’t say this lightly—that the great black oaks knew me. I don’t mean they knew me as myself and not another—that kind of individualism was not in the air—but that they recognized and responded to my presence, and to my mood. They began to offer, or I began to feel them offer, their serene greeting. It was like a quick change of temperature, a warm and comfortable flush, faint yet palpable, as I walked toward them and beneath their outflowing branches. (Winter Hours 96)

Oliver’s physical experience of being known is in her recognition of the subtle but palpable changes in something like temperature. Just as Oliver becomes a butterfly, in “Building a House,” she feels the acceptance of the physical world because she recognizes in it some affinity.

Second one may connect physically with the earth by offering up the material of the body to the earth. Such an offering is taken in the physical exchange burying the dead. In Oliver’s case burial of the dead is the placement of pets, dogs, buried in the woods where they walked. It is the discovery of paw prints from a lost animal and the desire to preserve those markings in the mud, physically fossilize the presence in the earth (Winter Hours).

Finally, a house, or a human, is minor compared to the landscape and place. A human lives seventy to a hundred years if they are lucky. A dog lives fifteen. A house may last a few centuries if cared for, but the landscape, the waves and wind and water, keep coming, rolling along in their timeless manner (Winter Hours). They will crash, and blow, and lap as long as the world stands. Because the human and the house are temporary it is important to know a place more intimately than just the sheetrock and carpet. It is important to walk the woods or seashore or desert in order to keep perspective on one’s self in the

scheme of constructing home and place. A home, or place, or a person cannot be separate from the land, environment or weather. These are the physical realities of the Earth as a home. Each part is instrumental to the other, human and nonhuman alike.

All matter is the same matter. It is all conserved in the universe and within our planet Earth. The physical aspects of home are the physical aspects of the self. And the self is an emotional and intimate entity that experiences the physical world sensually and imaginatively. Both the imagination and the senses construct a whole sense of place. The language, the weighty substance of species and material, the darkness, and the meaning of home are entwined as the human experience of place, of home.

CHAPTER 6

COMMITTING TO PLANET HOME: THE GLOBAL HOME ETHIC

As shown throughout this thesis, home is a complex, intimate, and personal experience with place. To define it as a simple algorithm of location, or meaning, is too simplistic. And while this thesis has focused on three necessary aspects of constructing a sense of home: tradition, identity, and the physical world, these are by no means the only nuances in knowing place. These three aspects do, however, provide a basis for understanding the human experience of place as home.

But the human experience of home is only worthwhile if people can find home. The practical purpose of examining how humans find and construct home is to address the malady of our moment, namely the environmental degradation of our planetary home, Earth. For the past several years there has been a trend in our cultural media of presenting the material, the content, the conversation of searching for home. In movies such as Away We Go and the blockbuster hit Avatar the main premise is the search and discovery of home. Weekly stories of the housing market, the housing bubble bursting, the real estate bailouts, and Wall Street's toxic assets made up of home mortgage speculation fill newspapers, television broadcasts, and airwaves. Hundreds of thousands of people throughout the world

are displaced from their houses by weather and warfare. As refugees they search for a new place to call home. Everywhere people are searching for home and a place in this world. And all the while we, humans, are mining, drilling, excavating, and cultivating the resources of the earth to our own immediate benefit.

If people are searching for home then it must be something that someone can find, or make. Surely it cannot be altogether gone, as there are plenty of people who seem to be in place in their houses, neighborhoods, communities, and countries. Yet, the anxiety to know home surrounds us everywhere and in response to this anxiety I have researched the ways humans make, identify, or locate home.

What I have found in my research is detailed in my previous chapters. Home is built out of tradition—a story, an origin, an example that allows the individual to find place within a community. With a sense of a tradition and community one creates a sense of self—a mobile sense of home that is carried in identity and that connects people and place, objects and economies, animals and nature, all to the self. And finally the mobile self is able to connect to the specificity of place in the physical world by observation, sensual attendance to the weather, the resources, the weight of the material world as a function of the material self. In recognizing the self as a material object, or a material other, the boundaries between “us” humans and “them” nature falls apart, and one recognizes the self as part of the material cycle of matter, or mobile connections, and the long tradition of life on this plant Earth. Each of these elements works together to facilitate the finding and construction of home. And if we humans can recognize the elements of home, that they are more universal and necessary than we seem to credit them at the current moment, then we can begin to formulate a collective

home ethic which will drive our actions to responsibly recognize and thus care for Earth as home.

To illustrate the home as a compilation of tradition, identity, and physical attachment I would like to relate a story from an article found in my September 2009 issue of *The High Country News*. This particular issue is dedicated to the topic of home, and as I perused the pages I came across the article “Township 13 South, Range 92 West, Section 35” written by Michelle Nijhuis. The story talks about the plateaus of Colorado where the author and her husband live. The anxiety of the author is in determining whether or not she can make a home for herself and her family on the desolate plateau located at Township 13 South, Range 92 West, and Section 35 (a segmentation drawn out of the Cartesian divisions of survey established by President Thomas Jefferson). To try and answer that question of home she digs into the history of the place, searching the genealogy of the land, the property records, and the museum archives. In her search Nijhuis discovers the story of Elizabeth Foote, a girl whose father once owned the land where the author now lives—a place once called “Foote Fields.”

At the turn of the twentieth century, George Foote, Elizabeth’s father, bought up 200 acres of the Colorado Plateau, helped dig the Fire Mountain Canal, and started to raise crops with his family. The story of Elizabeth Foote is a fatal story; she grows up a serious child and stays on the family farm after high school graduation—a time when others her age were desperately trying to escape. At the age of twenty-five she sleep walks into the night and drowns in the Fire Mountain Canal.

In her own quest for belonging Nijhuis finds and focuses on this story—a community of the plateau struck by the tragedy of Elizabeth Foote. Nijhuis looks for the foundation of

the Foote home, but doesn't find it. Decades of life have erased it from view. And this concerns Nijhuis because it makes her wonder what it means for a sense of home. What physical markers can tie her to the land? What genealogy connects her to Colorado? She knows that her ancestors lived on the East coast; she grew up in New York. What does she have in Colorado to tie her to the land? Can the small community, built by her husband and his friends, be a home? Nijhuis concludes,

In my search for a home place, I sometimes catch myself
longing for a place of no surprises, a refuge from uncertainty.
But home—no matter where we happen to find it—is just as
beautiful and dangerous and changeable as anywhere else, as
full of mysteries and restless souls. (HCN 19)

The process that Nijhuis undertakes to find a sense of home follows my points exactly. First she searches out the tradition, the “history,” of the place she is living. She constructs a tradition of origin with the founder of “Foote Fields,” George Foote, and the story of his daughter’s death. From this foundation she continues her construction of home by identifying with the community of hardworking individuals who once settled the plateau just as her husband and his friends have again. Finally, Nijhuis searches for the physical connection to the place. She seeks a material confirmation of the existence of Elizabeth Foote’s home trying to cement her own sense of connection to the story, the community, and to the physical place of home. While she lacks the hard evidence of footings from the Foote house, or the material signs of their existence, she is able to find evidence of the Fire Mountain Canal. All the pieces of constructing a sense of home, as discussed in this paper, are in place.

Yet, what impresses me about Michelle Nijhuis’s conclusion is that despite how much she has uncovered and how specific the stories of Foote Fields are, she still finds this

place “just as beautiful and dangerous and changeable as anywhere else.” What I take from Nijhuis’s story is that there is one final element to making home. The final element necessary to making a home is the personal commitment to a place. Only as the individual recognizes the responsibility to claim a place as part of his or her own tradition, identity, and physical self can a place become a home.

When one commits to engaging with a place—a specific tradition, environment, and identity as home—and learns to act as part of that place, or community, or ecosystem, or planet then one takes on the responsibility of engaging mindfully and respectfully with all the life, tradition, and material of that place as a home. Home, any home, is an ecosystem of engagement and responsibility. Engagement requires spending time in a place, pausing as Tuan writes, to form connections to the landscape. As one turns the soil and changes the landscape, as one engages in the environment and community, one feels connected to it through the connection of engagement. Thinking of Nijhuis’s husband, I wonder if he has the same ambiguity to the land where he physically built his home, compared to his wife who married into it? The point is that commitment requires action and responsibility for the home-place. Each individual is interdependent upon the next individual and the home is only established and maintained by a collective commitment to that end.

It is the interdependent, collective effort of committed individuals to tradition, identity, and the physical world that I suggest is the grounds for finding and making a home, and upon this is the premise building a global home ethic. Conservationist and writer Aldo Leopold writes, “all ethics rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts” (*A Sand County Almanac* 203). A global home ethic is one in which the borders of home are expanded to encompass every part of the community

required to make up the whole sense of home; expanded to encompass the whole Earth as our home. Leopold continues, “The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include solids, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land” (A Sand County Almanac 204). When one commits to home and begins to perform home sensibly and sustainably the boundaries of home begin to swell, expanding over a broader range, breaking down the borders built up by political, national, economic, or human agendas. The specific local identity of home becomes the global home identity. Our connection to the globe, to the material resources of home, to the communities and cultures spread across the globe, and our respect and observance of traditions rupture any sense of “local” (a term which can perpetuate borders and divisions) and instead encapsulates the whole earth as home.

The notion of the Earth as a single organism, and the life sustained upon it as matter contributing to, and being expunged from, the organism through natural processes, is not a new idea. Dr. James Lovelock, an independent research scientist living in the UK, developed one of the leading theories of this planet home concept which he first put forth as the hypothesis he called “Gaia” in 1969. This hypothesis suggests Gaia, or the Earth, to be:

A complex entity involving the Earth’s biosphere, atmosphere, oceans, and soil; the totality constituting a feedback or cybernetic system which seeks an optimal physical and chemical environment for life on this planet. The maintenance of relatively constant conditions by active control may be conveniently described by the term ‘homoeostasis.’ (Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth 11)

Essentially humans are just cogs in a systems, the ecosystem, and the actions we humans take have an impact upon the system, or greater organism at large. The concept of Gaia demonstrates the collective and ethic that Aldo Leopold put forth. That as humans and animals, soils and atmospheres act and interact with and upon one another, there is a basic

ethic, or awareness necessary for the conduct and continuation of life on this planet. While it is accepted that Gaia maintains life without respect to what other organisms thrive on her life giving properties, humans make conscious decisions about actions and interactions—so far as we are aware.

It is an awareness of the dependence upon other systems for sustainability that I see at the heart of a global home ethic. The root of this ethic, establishing a code of conduct within the system within which we function, stands in an awareness of the whole community, ecosystem, environment, and organism upon which we depend for life—planet Earth. Where one may find this awareness is within the boundaries of space and place. It is built into the structure of home and place. It is conveyed through tradition, culture, and the physical world.

Awareness of the self within the systems is the basis of this thesis paper, through various points of view, through the exploration of home. The point of environmental humanities is to connect the human to his or her environment by constructing awareness through language, culture, and physical presence. Home is one way to understand that connection, and in establishing the self within the bounds of home through language and presence then awareness to a global home ethic is possible. By extending the self out to the greater organism of the earth and recognizing the self within that scheme one may begin to establish a commitment to the global home through the smaller means of building and maintaining home in place. As the earth tends to life on all scales, humans may reflect that conservation of life and energy while building up a sense of home. This is where the elements of my paper come into play. The goal is to make people aware of the constructs of

home in order to introduce strategies for identifying and building home to allow people to connect to the self, their traditions, and ultimately the Earth as home.

Through the humanities, art, popular culture, media, and through the natural environment people can begin to connect to the common culture of home. In recognizing the commonalities of tradition: the need to be a part of a community and the similarities in origin stories found across the globe, one can work towards a global tradition of home. Just as the ancient Gwich'in needed one another to survive, people everywhere, maybe more than ever, need each other to survive.

Culturally as we expand our conception of the self into a new mestiza of sorts, a collective and accepting self, one that is aware of the inconsistencies and contradictions of culture and history, of identity, and labels; and as we release the borders that divide us into binaries of "us" and "them," we begin to make room for a global culture, one that is aware of the interdependence of our actions and habits. Such awareness allows people to relate to a global concept of home by conceptualizing the connections between time, space, objects, people, and the self. And this conceptualization offers an identity as selves within a global community.

With a place in the global community the next step to achieving a global home ethic is our personal identity with the physical world, nature, and our environments. This identity with the earth is one filled with responsibility. Across the globe people are beginning to see the value of this connection and are taking action by turning to natural, organic, and responsible means of conservation.

Only after people identify with the traditions, community, and the Earth, as a global home will they then be able to commit to a global home ethic. And such an ethic is

imperative to the health and welfare of current and future generations. There are those who suggest that even with such efforts our world is doomed. This doom is certain if we do not exercise our abilities to care for the Earth. And despite the criticism of home, it is a strong force which can reverse the tide of destruction. Miracles if you like, healing if you will, home has the power to motivate and sustain those who build and secure it. Home constructs the individual as the individual constructs the home, and together, with all soils, animals, and plants of the planet, the Earth can repair and replenish. Home may be a place of pause and meaning again.

A global home ethic is one in which humans recognize their function within the Earth's ecosystem as home. One where our sense of home begins small, confined to localized experience but in time, as we implement a responsible social commitment to building home in place—a local home ethic built upon tradition, identity, and physical connection—then the actions and performance of home expand through our interdependent connections and the local can expand beyond borders to include all the Earth as planet home.

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